



# REBIRTH OF THE THIEF WHO ROAMED THE WORLD

BOOK 03

*Mad Snail*

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# Rebirth of the Thief Who Roamed The World

(重生之贼行天下)

by

**Mad Snail**

(发飙的蜗牛)

# Synopsis

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The world's largest VRMMO, Conviction, was almost like a second world for humanity.

It had integrated itself into the real world's economy, with both corporations and individuals seeking their fortunes through the game.

In this game, Nie Yan prided himself in his Level 180 Thief.

He could barely be considered among the top experts in the game.

Though, that was the only thing he could take pride in.

He was penniless and unable to advance in life; a situation he was forced into by the enemy of his father.

If it weren't for the little money he made by selling off items in Conviction, he would've barely been able to eat.

In the end, he chose to settle his matters once and for all.

He assassinated his father's enemy.

He lay dying shortly after being shot in the pursuit.

However, that wasn't the end of his story.

Instead, he awoke moments later to find that he had reincarnated into his past-self.

Armed with his experience and knowledge of future events, he sets out to live his life anew.

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English Translation by LittleShanks @ [Wuxiaworld](#)

Translation Edit by Bigredcomrade, Flowerbridgetoo,  
Doom\_Chicken @ [Wuxiaworld](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

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# Chapter 201 – The Secret Of Kiln Fire Woods

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Travelling through the dark tunnels of the lava caverns, the group finally arrived at their exit.

“Boss, let’s take a photo!” Undying Scoundrel suggested. What they had just accomplished was a historic moment for the entire guild. Of course he’d want something to commemorate it with.

Nie Yan thought for a moment. “Sure, but only release the photo after all of this is over.” It was best if Victorious Return temporarily didn’t know that they had already left Kiln Fire Woods.

“The people from Victorious Return definitely won’t be happy when they see the photo. I can already see their ugly expressions! Victorious Return has twenty to thirty thousand players digging three feet deep into the ground across every inch of the map right now, searching for us. I bet they’re not expecting that we’re already gone!” Undying Scoundrel let out a wicked cackle.

“Heaven Breaker will be so furious! He’ll definitely vomit out blood!”

Blowhard Summer Bug and the others gleefully imagined Heaven Breaker’s reaction in their heads.

“Everybody, gather around! Let’s make sure our red names are in plain view!”

Everyone was in high spirits.

Ten people stood together, all of whom were branded red. It was a spectacular sight. Even the name of Leader Young Seven was tainted red, although his was the lightest shade out of the entire group. Everyone else was a deep, soul-tremoring crimson.

Undying Scoundrel, Sun, and the others made rude poses, as if to mock the people of Victorious Return.

「Snap!」A camera shutter sound rang out. The picture was taken. After this was all over, it would be uploaded to the web. They would invariably go down in history for the events of today, remembered by the players for a long time to come.

“Alright, everyone should run along now. Go clear your red names,” Nie Yan said. It was too dangerous to stay branded as a PKer for long.

“Big Brother, I’ll go scout the path ahead.” Sun set off to investigate the situation outside. He would immediately report back if he encountered enemy forces. The number of players patrolling the outer perimeter of the map definitely weren’t few. So when retreating, they would have to be extra cautious to avoid being discovered.

“Get in contact with Yao Yao. You guys should join up with her to clear your red names. When I’ve settled the matters over here, I’ll take you all levelling with me in Everlasting City,” Nie Yan said.

With how high all their kill counts were, maybe one of them would get lucky and find a Killer's Demonic Medallion.

"Alright, you be careful too," Young Seven said.

"Boss, be safe."

"We'll be leaving. Take care, Boss."

The members of the group said their farewells to Nie Yan one after another.

"Stay safe on your journey!" Nie Yan smiled. He felt more or less reassured about them. Even if they encountered a patrol group, as long as the number of players on the enemy side didn't exceed a hundred, Victorious Return would be helpless to stop them.

While the group of nine players set out, Nie Yan turned around and returned to the lava caverns. Taking advantage of the remaining duration on Deterrence, he rushed back toward Kiln Fire Woods.

In the depths of the lava caverns, the scalding hot air churned and roiled and tongues of flame billowed upward from deep underground.

In the previous timeline, only after many players reached Level 40–50 did the first group of people dare to explore these lava caverns. With the Viper Flies no longer posing a threat, they



travelled through the long and narrow tunnels to the deepest parts of the lava caverns, where they finally uncovered the secret of Kiln Fire Woods.

Nie Yan smirked. The next phase of his plan would bring disaster to Victorious Return. But to proceed, he would have to lure their forces to the center of the map.

Nie Yan left the lava caverns. He activated Stealth, then began investigating the surroundings where he found a group of players from Victorious Return. He slowly approached them.

The players were currently chatting. They consisted of five members, an Elementalist, a Berserker, a Paladin, a Holy Mage, and a Priest.

All of them wore decent gear, and were around Level 20.

“Say, how many strong players do you think Asskickers United has? Those guys in the video are really strong. I feel like they aren’t any weaker than Yu Long, Skinny Dog, and them!” the Berserker said in a slightly fearful tone. Such a terrifying group of players had a chance of appearing before them at any moment!

“Who knows? Maybe those ten are all they have,” the Elementalist replied. He found it almost inconceivable that a newly-emerged guild would have so many top-notch experts.

“Why do you think the guild leader keeps insisting on making

trouble for Asskickers United? Isn't that just asking for trouble?" the Berserker asked in a puzzled tone.

"Are you stupid? What do you know? Asskickers United has only been around for a few weeks at most, yet they've already grown so powerful! Can you imagine how strong they'll get in the future if we don't do anything about them now? It's basic guild strategy!" said the Holy Mage who was the leader of the group.

"You're saying Asskickers United will pose a threat to our guild in the future?" the Berserker asked in a startled manner.

Several members in the group sank into deep thought. Looking at the current momentum of Asskickers United, there really was such a possibility. If Asskickers United did surpass them to become the top guild in Calore, then they would lose all feeling of superiority. Currently, every time they set out, they would hold their heads up with pride. Some of them even loathed the fact they couldn't scribble the words—We, Victorious Return, are the number one guild in Calore!—on their faces. However, if Asskickers United took away that position, the glory of Victorious Return would be all for naught. What else would they have left to take pride in? On that day, many members would definitely start having thoughts of departing the guild.

And so would begin the demise of Victorious Return

Nie Yan slowly crept up behind them. He was only a five meters away from the Priest. All of them were incognizant of the imminent danger to their lives.

By allowing a Thief to approach so closely, they had basically sealed the fate of their Priest. How a Thief ambushed a target was similar to the way a cheetah stalked its prey on a hunt. With a cheetah's explosive sprinting power, as long as it could get within a certain distance of its prey, the prey would be taken down in a flash.

The Priest felt a cold breeze brush the back of his neck. However, the feeling was so faint and fleeting that he simply didn't pay heed. He leisurely chatted with the others, oblivious to the nearing threat.

With only three meters separating them, Nie Yan leapt into action. Smothering Strike! His dagger struck out toward the back of the Priest's head.

The Priest finally sensed the danger. Taking into account the abruptness of it all, he reacted pretty quickly. Just as he was about to dodge, Nie Yan's blow landed and he was stunned.

No matter how much faster the Priest's reaction speed got, it still couldn't match the speed of Nie Yan's dagger.

Nie Yan followed through with Backstab, then ruthlessly finished him off with Eviscerate. The Priest went limp, collapsing to the ground.

The four remaining players were momentarily dazed. The Elementalist was the first to snap out of the shock, firing off an Ice

Shatter at the ambusher.

The Berserker rushed at Nie Yan with Charge. The Paladin cast Indomitable Will on the Berserker, bolstering his speed even further.

The Holy Mage activated Holy Judgement. An imposing radiance poured down from the sky.

Nie Yan could clearly sense this group was much more difficult to deal with than the players from Unhindered. They were probably some of the more highly skilled players in Victorious Return.

Nie Yan could kill two or three more of them and escape, but he didn't linger. He activated Shadow Dance and disappeared from sight.

The attacks of the Berserker, Holy Mage and Elementalist all missed. There wasn't a single trace of Nie Yan in the surroundings. He was gone!

Nie Yan's appearance was abrupt and short, so quick none of them were able to react. However, in that brief moment, he had left behind a corpse on the ground.

"I got a good look at him. It was that Thief from Asskickers United!" All four of them felt a cold chill running down their spines. They huddled close together with their backs facing each other, afraid that when Nie Yan emerged again, the next person to

drop dead on the ground would be them!

A Thief could actually be so terrifying!

They reported the information back to Yu Long.

「Boss, we've discovered the group from Asskickers United...」The Berserker went on to explain the encounter with Nie Yan.

「Where? Give me the coordinates.」

「2885.285.332.」

Yu Long thought for a moment. He immediately instructed the first and second squadron which consisted of 6,000 players in total to move toward that area.

Nie Yan's movement didn't simply end there. Yu Long soon received reports of Nie Yan appearing at 2885.285.279, 2885.285.239, and 2885.285.202. It was just like with the first group. Right as he emerged, he would kill a player, then disappear. No one could predict where he would pop up next.

“What is he planning...?” Yu Long muttered to himself. He was struck by an indescribable sense of foreboding. What was the meaning behind Nie Yan's actions? Did he just want to kill the players of Victorious Return, or was there a different, more sinister and heinous purpose?

It would truly prove a bit difficult to lock down a top-tier Thief in such complex terrain.

Yu Long had no choice but to mobilize more of his forces to that general location, especially the Priests. He had them cast Illuminate to search for traces of Nie Yan.

Nie Yan could clearly feel the number of players in his vicinity gradually increasing. Several times he had been exposed by the light from a Priest's Illuminate. Luckily, he was always able to get away in time before he was surrounded.

“Almost there...” Nie Yan's mouth curved into a faint smile. He returned to the lava caverns. When he entered the area where Viper Flies spawned, he activated Deterrence, then dashed toward the deepest region unimpeded.

The ambient temperature grew increasingly hotter the deeper down he travelled. Nie Yan drank a Fire Resistance Potion as he darted through scorching blasts of torrid air, venturing even further into the depths.

He saw the glow of flames leaping up high into the air, and massive columns of smoke surging towards the ceiling from the magma flowing down below.

No Viper Flies wandered around this area due to the extreme heat of the environment. Even Nie Yan was losing ten health every second while staying here, as damage values floated up above his

head.

The effects of the Fire Resistance Potion weren't potent enough to completely nullify the heat damage. If a player didn't have at least 30 Fire Resistance, they shouldn't even think of exploring any further.

Nie Yan scoured through every rock in the area, periodically drinking an Intermediate Health Potion and Recovery Potion. It wasn't easy for him to maintain his constantly falling health.

Three minutes later, he found what he was searching for. It was a dark gold treasure chest tucked away in a dark corner, embedded deeply among some large rocks. Were it not for him searching so carefully, there was no way he would've found it.

Finally! Nie Yan's face glowed with excitement as he laid eyes on the chest. He dropped down on one knee and started opening it.

Opening treasure chest... Estimated Completion: 2%... 17%... 29%... 37%...

As seconds turned to minutes, the chest finally opened with a light click! Nie Yan glanced at his health bar—only 27% remaining. He stood up and applied a Combat Bandage to himself, whereupon his health gradually began recovering.

He bent down and started rummaging through the chest. He fished out two items. The first was a blood-red pearl, sparkling and limpid. It emitted a bright red glow in the darkness, resembling a ball of burning flame. The second item was a black skill book.



# Chapter 202 – Grimmer Soul Staff!

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Nie Yan appraised the red pearl between his fingers. It was precisely what he had been searching for all along, a Kiln Fire Heart!

The legendary Elementalist, Countess Alicia, created ten Kiln Fire Hearts out of the lava from the world’s core. A Kiln Fire Heart wasn’t an inherently magical item, but it did provide some useful effects such as enhancing the player’s Fire Resistance. It was a rare, special item.

In the distant past, Countess Alicia utilized the Kiln Fire Hearts as catalysts to summon a powerful Lava Titan to kill several tens of thousands of invaders from the Underworld, writing down an eternal legend in the Kiln Fire Woods. However, since the Lava Titan was nigh impossible to control, she herself ended up being devoured as well, buried deep beneath the earth where the lava flowed.

## Kiln Fire Heart (Special Item)

Properties: Fire Resistance +50, Fire Magic Amplification +20%

Kiln Fire: Allows the player to possess the strength of the Kiln Fire, becoming immune to all fire damage for 30 seconds. The player can survive in lava.

Cooldown: 20 minutes

Restriction: Cannot be used by creatures of darkness.

The Kiln Fire Heart was an accessory, and so it had to be equipped in an accessory slot to take effect. Although it was best on Elementalists and Arcane Mages, it was also a treasure that was hard to come by for Nie Yan. Whether in PvE or PvP, becoming immune to fire damage would give him a huge advantage. Almost a third of all Elementalist spells were Fire Magic, and many relied on Fire Magic as their primary source of damage. If Nie Yan activated Kiln Fire while battling an Elementalist, a third of the opponent's spells would instantly become useless. Such an advantage grew even more pronounced against Arcane Mages. More than half of all spells at an Arcane Mage's disposal dealt fire damage. He would essentially be cutting down the opponent's offensive power by over fifty percent.

The boost in Fire Resistance was also considerable. It signified that Nie Yan could travel to any map below Level 50 that had requirements for Fire Resistance, and he would gain an advantage when hunting fire-type monsters.

The Fire Magic Amplification property, however, was pretty much useless to Nie Yan. He was a Thief, not a Mage.

Nie Yan examined the skill book.

Skill Book: Cut Throat

Requirements: Level 35

Description: Slash open the throat of a target from behind with an increased chance of a critical hit. Chance of dealing a

fatal blow if the target is lower levelled than the user. Only effective against humanoid creatures.

Properties; Deal 130% damage. 20% chance of dealing 200% critical damage. 10% chance of dealing 300% critical damage.

Cooldown: 30 seconds

Restriction: Thief; can be learned by any faction.

Cut Throat was a rare, advanced skill with high damage multipliers.

Nie Yan still wasn't at a high enough level to learn Cut Throat. He stored away the skill book in his bag, then equipped the Kiln Fire Heart, whereupon his Fire Resistance increased by a large margin. He no longer needed to be afraid of taking heat damage. He continued travelling deeper down. Two to three minutes later, he arrived beside a sweltering pool of lava.

A scalding heat rose up from the pool which covered about 3030 square meters. As Nie Yan looked toward the center, he saw a woman floating motionlessly in the lava. She wore a fiery red robe. Clashed in her hand was a staff with a fist-sized, flame-red ruby embedded at the top. It was the famed, sealed Grimmar Soul Staff. Her face was above the surface of the lava. She had smooth, delicate features with skin as white as jade. She was so beautiful it was almost stifling.

This woman was Countess Alicia, the legendary Elementalist.

She was only sleeping, not dead. The Lava Titan didn't kill her. It was said that the Lava Titan she summoned grew sentient. It

possessed at least some capacity for thought, albeit not much. The simple-minded creature deeply loved the countess. It only wanted to embrace her closely, protecting her within its own body, and not allow anyone else to touch her.

And so, Countess Alicia had been lying dormant ever since. She would only awaken if the Lava Titan was killed. Most notably, on the body of the countess was a quest related to the Sealed Grimmar Soul Staff.

Its final reward was a Legendary set!

At the peak of its glory in the previous timeline, Holy Empire once formed a 3,000 man force consisting of only players over Level 100 to take down the Lava Titan. They had a Thief lure the creature above ground to the Kiln Fire Woods where they slew it. However, Holy Empire suffered one of its heaviest losses in that battle. Of the 170 teams, over a third of them were wiped out. Victorious Return took advantage of that opportunity to lay siege to the strongholds of Holy Empire, forcing them to withdraw from Kiln Fire Woods. Afterward, Radiant Sacred Flame swooped in and snatched the reward away for themselves. However, even though Radiant Sacred Flame received the quest line from Countess Alicia, they were never able to finish it in the end. Not a single member of the 1,000 man force they sent to a city in the Underworld came back alive.

It subsequently became known as one of the most difficult Legendary quest lines to complete.

In the previous timeline, coming within two meters of Countess

Alicia or touching any part of her body would cause the Lava Titan to emerge. However, this posed a bit of a problem to Nie Yan because the countess was more than ten meters away from him. If he tried leaping over, thirty seconds was enough time for him to swim there and back, but it was still very dangerous.

If he was still in the lava when Kiln Fire's duration ended, he would be instantly incinerated into ashes.

Nie Yan looked upward, noticing the large columns of rock hanging down from the ceiling. The nearest one was only three meters away from Countess Alicia. He suddenly had a brilliant idea. Activating the ability of the Crawler Ring, he leaped off the edge of the pool and clung onto the ceiling. He nimbly crawled toward the column closest to the countess where he slowly slid down until he reached the end.

Countess Alicia held her magnificent staff in the center of the pool. Her eyes were tightly closed, a sign that she was in a deep sleep, black hair floating just above the surface, gently drifting along the gradual currents.

Countess Alicia was truly a nation-toppling beauty. No wonder even the creature she summoned ended up being entranced by her good looks.

The staff in her hands was crafted out of blue crystal which emitted a reserved glow. It was engraved with all sorts of mysterious, runic patterns, and embedded at the top was a fist-sized translucent orb with a ball of scarlet-red flame burning within.

The Grimmar Soul Staff possessed powerful flame magic. Even though it was sealed, it still possessed unrivalled power. It was fully deserving of being called a godly weapon!

The Grimmar Soul Staff was only one part of a Legendary set. However, even though it was only one part, it was still frighteningly powerful!

Such an item was right within reach.

Nie Yan shot out a line of webbing from his Silk Spinner Ring which stuck to the Grimmar Soul Staff. With a jerk of the line, he flung the staff out of Countess Alicia's hands and caught it.

A powerful wave of uncontrollable elemental energy surged up Nie Yan's arm, causing him to almost drop the staff.

However, Nie Yan was able to endure. He didn't dare to waste any time appraising the staff. Storing it away in his bag, he crawled to the top of the column where he leaped off and landed safely on the ground outside the pool of lava.

The entire place started shaking violently. The lava in the pool rose up like a tornado, rapidly condensing before taking the form of a titan. Its lower half was steeped in lava while its upper body was large and intimidating. It was composed entirely of lava and emitted a terrifying heat.

Nie Yan rushed out of the lava caverns. In one or two minutes, the Lava Titan would bring the entire place down.

The Lava Titan discovered someone had stolen Countess Alicia's Grimmar Soul Staff. It let out an enraged roar as the walls of the lava caverns cracked and started collapsing. All the rock surrounding the Lava Titan rapidly melted before being absorbed into its body. It continuously grew in size as it charged toward the surface.

Almost twenty minutes had passed since Yu Long last received any information about Nie Yan. His subordinates scoured through every area that Nie Yan had passed through, but they hadn't found a single trace of him. A sense of dread gradually seeped its way into his heart.

「Boss, we found a cave over here. It's an entrance to the lava caverns.」

Yu Long furrowed his brows. Could Nie Yan have already escaped from Kiln Fire Woods through the lava caverns? What was the point of them staying here to search for him, then?

As Yu Long brooded over the matter, the earth beneath him started shaking violently as cracks began opening up. His complexion paled. What was going on!?

About a minute earlier, the several hundred players gathered around the entrance saw a figure rushing out of the lava caverns at top speed.

“It’s that Thief! Stop him!” some players shouted, only to see Nie Yan disappeared from sight. He flitted past several of them while in stealth.

Several dozen orbs of light flew up into the air from Illuminate. Under the penetrating radiance, Nie Yan’s figure was revealed.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」A shower of spells bombarded Nie Yan. He activated Swift Retreat, increasing his movement speed while escaping by 30%. He tightly clutched an Unknown Transfer Scroll in his hand. In case anything went wrong, he would teleport away immediately. No matter how much health he had, he still wouldn’t be able to endure such a concentrated barrage from so many Mages.

Seeing that his health was running low, Nie Yan chugged an Intermediate Health Potion, restoring it back to full.

He still had many life-saving measures on him such as the Chapter of Courage which would make him temporarily immune to all magic or the Unknown Transfer Scroll which would teleport him away. However, unless he was backed into a corner, he wouldn’t rashly use them.

At this moment, the ground suddenly started fiercely trembling. The group of players from Victorious Return started to turn ashen with fright, as they saw red-hot molten rock surging toward them from the lava caverns. With unstoppable momentum, a dozen-meter wave threatened to swallow them whole.



“It’s lava! Quickly run!”

“Shit! Everybody, run!”

The entire group fled for their lives. Reflected in their eyes was the torrent of lava, framed by their horror as they watched it come toward them. In the next moment, they were all engulfed.

## Chapter 203 – Unrivalled Titan

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Before the five to six hundred players camping outside the entrance of the lava caverns could understand what was going on, they were swept up by the surging tide of lava, letting out blood-curdling screams as they transformed into rays of light.

Lava flowed out rapidly like a ferocious fiery beast engulfing everything in its path. If it was allowed to continue flowing unimpeded, all of Kiln Fire Woods would be transformed into a sea of flames in just a few hours.

The seven entrances to the caverns spewed out tons of lava into air, resembling a volcanic eruption. The molten chunks of rock flew for several hundred meters before raining down on the map like a meteor shower.「BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!」They carved out giant craters into the earth, lighting the immediate vicinity on fire and creating a red glow in the sky.

Over two thousand players from Victorious Return and Unhindered died during the first few moments of the eruption. The lava flow was spreading too quickly. Most players didn't even get a chance to react before they were consumed in the fiery inferno. A few perceptive individuals noticed the danger early, but even that couldn't save them. The lava had already gotten too close. It was too late to run, let alone use a Return Scroll.

「Return Scrolls! Everybody, use your Return Scrolls!」some players who were escaping the lava frantically called out in their guild chats.

Many players didn't understand what was going on. When they tried to get an answer out of the people panicking in the guild chat, they found that the other side had suddenly gone silent.

The lava rapidly merged together to form a forty to fifty-meter tall giant. It was sturdy, resembling a small mountain. Even the Guardian of Order that Nie Yan awoke after grabbing the Chapter of Courage was dwarfed by the Lava Titan.

The Lava Titan was a Level 200 Lord-class monster with almost three million health! It possessed a few notable skills: Lava Field, Lava Breaker, and Lava Roar.

Lava Field transformed the earth in a 500-meter radius around the Lava Titan into a sea of lava. Any player with under 120 Fire Resistance would be instantly burnt into a crisp. Those with 120 Fire Resistance or higher would constantly lose health every second.

Lava Breaker sent out a massive wave of lava that would bury every creature in the vicinity of the Lava Titan.

The most terrifying was Lava Roar! If the magical energy in Kiln Fire Woods fluctuated too violently, the skill could silence all Mages as well as prevent the activation of any magical item for a short period of time. Even teleportation scrolls weren't exempt from this. It was the same as a silencing field. In the entirety of Kiln Fire Woods, the Lava Titan reigned supreme!

In the previous timeline, players discovered the existence of the

Lava Titan when they were only around Level 40–50. However, it wasn't until later when many players surpassed Level 100 that a group dared to challenge the Lava Titan. Even then, it still required the cooperation of several thousand players to make an attempt. At that time, very few Fighters could endure the attacks of the Lava Titan. Resplendent Bladelight was one of them. Aside from him, there were two other such Fighters known to the public. One was in Holy Empire, and the other was in Radiant Sacred Flame. Many guilds fought over the Lava Titan because of some information released on the official forums. The Lava Titan was related to the Grimmar Set, and it was the key to removing the seal on the Grimmar Soul Staff. It would also drop some highly sought after materials such as Fire Essence which could be used to craft Legendary items.

There were many bosses that had already been discovered and even more that were yet to be discovered in the Atlanta continent. Each one was incredibly difficult to deal with. The Lava Titan was no exception. No matter how great the force, it wasn't an existence that could be touched by players under Level 100.

Nie Yan was sprinting through Kiln Fire Woods at top speed.

The enraged Lava Titan moved in the direction that Nie Yan had fled. It wanted to retrieve Countess Alicia's Grimmar Soul Staff.

「Guo Huai, can you tell me where the players from Victorious Return and Unhindered are the most densely concentrated? Hurry up, it's urgent.」Nie Yan sent a message to Guo Huai who was back at headquarters.

「Alright, give me ten seconds.」Guo Huai hastily gathered the information after receiving Nie Yan's request.

Nie Yan madly dashed across the map. Wherever he passed, the surrounding players would discover the Lava Titan trailing closely after him, and they would scatter in all directions. There wasn't enough time to use a Return Scroll. Some foolish people would madly flee in the direction of the several other entrances of the map, only to be met with a surging tide of lava.

After a brief moment, Guo Huai replied with the information Nie Yan wanted.「328, 108, and 028, several thousand people are gathered at those coordinates. The guild leader of Unhindered, Hei Zhuo, is at 2385.225.132. He's together with a high-ranking member of Victorious Return. I think he is called Yu Long.」

Hei Zhuo, huh...? Nie Yan remarked before sprinting toward where Hei Zhuo and Yu Long were located. He would arrive there in two to three minutes at most.

Yu Long and Hei Zhuo were currently chatting while surrounded by over a thousand Mages. The Mages were gathered in groups of three or four. Like the stars cupped around the moon, the Mages crowded around the two leaders to protect them. Almost all the Warriors and Paladins were escorting the Priests as they searched for signs of Nie Yan's group. Only two to three hundred Warriors remained behind to guard the area around the Mages.

The earthquakes from a moment ago calmed down after just a short while. Although Yu Long's heart was a little uneasy, it wasn't enough to give rise to any alarm.

Mere seconds later, however, the guild chat was flooded with frantic messages.

「Boss! There's Lava!」

「What are you talking about? Speak clearly.」Yu Long knitted his brows.

「The lava beneath Kiln Fire Woods is erupting onto the surface. Several hundred of our brothers have already died!」The player explained what happened, but what he saw was only a small slice of the bigger situation. In fact, the number of Unhindered and Victorious Return players who died had already surpassed three thousand.

Soon, Yu Long received information from other locations of the map—two to three hundred people dead over here, five to six hundred dead over there... Adding them together, the number of casualties was already ever so close to three thousand.

「I want all Victorious Return troops to withdraw!」Yu Long realized that the people from Asskickers United were probably responsible for this mayhem. The situation right now was anything but reassuring. He hastily told all his subordinates to withdraw. Afterward, he turned to Hei Zhuo. “Quickly tell your forces to return to Calore!”

“Why?” Hei Zhuo asked. He had yet to receive any information from his subordinates.

“Don’t ask questions! Just do as I say!” Yu Long told Hei Zhuo in a practically snarling tone. He was feeling incredibly anxious.

Hei Zhuo was angered at the sudden outburst. However, seeing how restless Yu Long seemed, he soon realized that the situation might have taken a turn for the worse. He quickly messaged his subordinates.

Teleportation circles began activating across Kiln Fire Woods one after another. Swaths of players numbering in the thousands were using them. It was quite spectacular to behold. Numerous flashes lit up the sky. Many Victorious Return players were the first to go back.

The magical energy in the atmosphere began fluctuating violently, almost as if some grand, forbidden magic was being cast.

At this moment, an earth-shaking roar echoed out from the depths of Kiln Fire Woods. A shock wave of energy swept out across the entire map at an unbelievable speed. It was declaring ownership of this territory. All the natural laws that governed this region were under its rule.

Countless teleportation circles that had just lit up were interrupted. The crowd of players gathered around the teleportation circles all took several hundred damage from the shock wave as a blanket of damage values rose up into the sky. The players who were a bit closer to the source of the roar were wiped out in an instant.

The number of fatal casualties on the side of Victorious Return and Unhindered instantly skyrocketed. Kiln Fire Woods was littered everywhere with the corpses of their players.

Hei Zuo's teleportation circle was interrupted, and he was knocked flying back by the shock wave. -378 A terrifyingly high damage value floated up above his head. He was badly frightened. "What the hell was that!?" He hastily chugged down a Junior Health Potion and an Intermediate Recovery Potion.

Yu Long's teleportation was also interrupted, and he suffered similarly. His face turned unsightly. The furious roar just now seemed to come from the depths of hell, proclaiming the advent of their destruction. Of the thousand plus Mages around him, five to six hundred dropped dead on the ground. He didn't know how many casualties the other locations suffered, but it definitely wouldn't be small.

"Everyone, quickly get out of here!" Yu Long shouted. They had to leave this place as soon as possible, lest they face utter annihilation.

Nie Yan was darting toward Yu Long and Hei Zhuo's location as a shock wave of energy hit him. He almost lost balance but made a quick recovery. -105 A damage value floated up above his head. He was slightly surprised. He didn't expect a Lava Roar to emerge so soon.

If a special condition wasn't triggered, the Lava Titan wouldn't



activate Lava Roar.

Even though the Lava Roar of the Lava Titan only dealt a little over a hundred damage to him, an ordinary player from Victorious Return would probably be instantly killed. He wondered how many people Victorious Return had lost this time.

As Nie Yan closed in on Yu Long and Hei Zhuo, he saw corpses littering the ground. It was an amazing sight. The players that survived were almost all tanky classes with high health and defense like Warriors and Paladins. The Mages suffered disastrous casualties, and practically all the Priests died. He never stopped recording.

Nie Yan finally reached his destination, appearing at the top of a slope. His eyes scanned over the crowd of players below him before finally locking onto Hei Zhuo and the Paladin beside him. The two of them were clearly calling the shots.

“It’s that Thief!” Before Nie Yan could stealth, a sharp-eyed Warrior discovered him at the top of the slope.

In a split second, all eyes collectively moved toward the top of the slope and locked onto Nie Yan.

“So I’ve been noticed, huh,” Nie Yan calmly remarked from atop the slope. Under the scrutiny of eight hundred players from Victorious Return and Unhindered, he pointed his dagger at Hei Zhuo. With his free hand, he made the cutthroat gesture using his thumb, then revealed a cruel smile on his face.

Not only was Nie Yan blatantly provoking Hei Zhuo and the crowd, he was also expressing the contempt Asskickers United had for them and declaring war!

Bladelight, I'll be getting some revenge on your behalf, Nie Yan thought. If he succeeded in taking out Hei Zhuo, Resplendent Bladelight, a top three Fighter in the previous timeline, would be completely loyal to him!

"Fuck! Kill him!" Hei Zhuo turned livid with rage from Nie Yan's taunting. His expression was warped.

Yu Long stared at Nie Yan's smiling expression. He didn't know why, but he felt a slight chill run down his spine. Despite being grossly outnumbered, Nie Yan declared Hei Zhuo's death. Under the gazes of almost eight hundred pairs of eyes, could he really kill Hei Zhuo?

Yu Long shook his head. It was impossible!

Yu Long raised his greatsword. Clad in silver-white armour, he resembled an iron tower standing beside Hei Zhuo. A Thief, huh? Come and try! Let's see if you can get through a mountain pass like me!

The players from Victorious Return and Unhindered moved to surround Nie Yan. However, in the blink of an eye, they discovered that the top of the slope was empty without a single trace of Nie Yan!

Nie Yan had vanished into thin air. With all the Priests dead, the only people remaining who could deal with him were the elite Paladins who learned Eyes of the Divine.

“Protect the guild leader!” a player shouted. The survivors gathered tightly around Hei Zhuo.

# Chapter 204 – Birth Of The Mad Rogue!

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Nie Yan was like a specter walking among the shadows. He left his pursuers unable to discover his whereabouts; they had lost all sight of him.

Eyes of the Divine!

Eyes of the Divine!

Five Paladins from Victorious Return activated Eyes of the Divine at the same time, releasing rays of holy light into the area. But even after activating the skill, they were unable to spot even a trace of Nie Yan. Logically, their Eyes of the Divine should be able to see through Nie Yan's stealth, or at the very least reveal a hint of his silhouette—unless his stealthing capability was above the range where they could detect him.

As they searched in the direction they thought Nie Yan had gone, a sound came from behind. Their minds trembled. Did Nie Yan already circle behind them?

“He's behind us!” cried out a Paladin who spotted Nie Yan after turning towards the source of the sound.

Meanwhile, Nie Yan judged the distance and headed for Hei Zhuo and Yu Long, his body light and his silhouette blurry as he swept past.

What an incredible movement speed! In just under five seconds, Nie Yan's elusive figure moved over fifty meters! These players, who had not seen such speed in the game before, couldn't wrap their heads around it.

There were still over seventy Mages alive after Lava Roar. They wanted to bombard Nie Yan with spells, but as they began chanting, they found their magic disappear before it could even take shape. The magical energy in the area was too unstable! There was no way for them to gather enough for a spell.

The Warriors didn't stand idly by as they led the charge, only to find that they couldn't keep up with Nie Yan. He was just too fast! With his astounding base speed boosted by Shadow Dance and a Haste Scroll, he could even outrun Warriors that used Charge.

Even with so many players trying to stop him, Nie Yan thought nothing of the blockade. To him they might as well not be there.

It wasn't long before he stood in front of the two leaders. The only thing standing between him and Hei Zhuo now was the Paladin, Yu Long!

Yu Long activated Eyes of the Divine, locking on to Nie Yan and firmly blocking the way to Hei Zhuo.

"Nie Yan, is it? Come, let me see just how skilled you are!" Yu Long roared. Because the magical energy in the air was so unstable, he couldn't activate any Holy Magic or buff himself with blessings. Radiating an imposing aura, Yu Long fiercely chopped at Nie Yan

with Radiant Slash.

Meanwhile, Hei Zhuo hadn't expect Nie Yan to arrive so quickly. He tried to cast a spell but found that the magical energy in the area was still too chaotic. He felt powerless. There was nothing he could do but place his hopes on Yu Long, praying that the Paladin could cut down Nie Yan.

Yu Long saw his strike easily dodged by Nie Yan who stabbed a dagger at his forehead in response. To him, Nie Yan was just a flashing silhouette as his strike hit nothing but air. His mind trembled. My attack missed? What incredible speed!

Yu Long's eyes were blinded by the cold glimmer of Nie Yan's dagger as it rapidly neared. He expected this frontal attack to be a Concussive Blow, so he quickly entered a defensive stance and moved his sword to block. Since he couldn't activate Indomitable Will, he didn't dare to take such a blow from Nie Yan head on. After he took only a single step back, Nie Yan disappeared from his line of sight. His heart clenched in worry.

Not good! Hei Zhuo!

With an elegant twist of his body, Nie Yan brushed past Yu Long. His speed reached the peak!

It was as if he had become one with a deity.

He was using footwork that could rival a professional dancer. It

was on the level of a Shadow Dancer!

Nie Yan thought back to when he was a Level 180 Great Thief, recalling the feelings of unrivalled speed and life and death in his grasp.

In that moment, the experiences of two lifetimes merged into a whole!

The resonance formed by the collision of both lives brought together through space and time allowed Nie Yan to enter a deep trance of self-reflection. The shackles which prevented him from breaking through to a Shadow Dancer in the previous timeline finally melted away. Only after a sudden flash of insight did he finally realize what he was lacking. It was that graceful agility, that preeminent tenacity, and that relentless momentum!

This was a Shadow Dancer!

Nie Yan's thoughts were very clear. He completely ignored Yu Long, as though the Paladin didn't exist. No one could block his movements, not the Paladin in front of him nor anyone else!

As Yu Long felt Nie Yan brush past him in a blur, a feeling of humiliation arose within him. With a horizontal sweep he tried to redeem himself but was only presented with another miss.

Nie Yan was like a shadow, intangible and uncatchable.

A sense of frustration flooded through Yu Long. Even though the inability to cast Holy Magic was a major handicap to him, Yu Long wasn't confident in his ability to stop Nie Yan even without a disadvantage. Nie Yan was just too fast and agile to catch up to.

Hei Zhuo noticed Nie Yan rushing towards him and hurriedly tried to retreat. However, the dagger aimed at him was like grim reaper wielding his scythe, creating a looming sense of despair.

It was undodgeable!

Hei Zhuo's mind went blank as the dagger pierced his forehead. In the blink of an eye, Nie Yan circled around to his back and landed a Backstab and Eviscerate. His actions were crisp and controlled, showing no signs of sloppiness.

As his eyes dimmed, Hei Zhuo fell to the ground with a thud.

After dealing the final blow to Hei Zhuo, Nie Yan finally stood still, creating a visual contrast with his speed-blurred form from before.

Seeing this, the hundreds of players still alive stared blankly at Nie Yan and the corpse of Hei Zhuo. Many of them even forgot to keep moving.

Hei Zhuo... died?

From the time they first noticed Nie Yan to the time Hei Zhuo



died, only fifteen seconds had passed. It had passed by in just a flash!

Nie Yan truly performed an unimaginable deed. Under the noses of nearly five hundred players, he had slain Hei Zhuo!

By the time Yu Long turned around, Hei Zhuo was already dead. It was far out of his expectations for Hei Zhuo to drop so quickly. This speed left a person without time to even think, much less react!

For a brief moment Yu Long and Nie Yan faced off, staring straight in each other's eyes. Lifting the greatsword in his hands, Yu Long issued a challenge, "I'm next. Let's see you finish me off!"

Nie Yan faintly smirked in reply before vanishing into thin air.

He couldn't be found anywhere.

What did the smirk signify? Disdain? Contempt? Or something else completely?

Nie Yan's final actions deeply struck at Yu Long's soul.

Yu Long suddenly felt the strength drain from his body. He felt cold sweat on his back as he realized that he had lost, completely and utterly. He was cowed by Nie Yan's immense speed. If the two of them crossed blades again, would he even be able to last more than a few seconds?

Nie Yan had used a single stunning blow, as if to tell the world he was unmatched!

“Boss, he left.” A Paladin walked up to Yu Long. He looked at Nie Yan’s silhouette dashing in the distance before disappearing among the trees.

No one tried to pursue him because they knew it’d be futile.

They finally learned just what a Thief truly was today. In the face of a massive army, they could effortlessly behead the general and the soldiers would scatter. Even though this saying was normally used to describe valiant generals of the past, it was quite befitting of Nie Yan.

“Huh?” Yu Long awoke from his stupor.

“What do we do next?” the Paladin asked.

His voice had barely faded before the blazing Lava Titan appeared behind them. It roared angrily, giving off an aura of intense power. With a wave of its arm, massive waves of lava rushed forth. It had used Lava Breaker to cover Yu Long’s remaining forces.

With a crashing boom, the lava swallowed everything in its path, including the five-hundred-plus players who had survived the first Lava Roar.

Over several thousand meters away, Nie Yan looked back at the angrily roaring Lava Titan. No one caught within its lava skills would be able to escape its merciless wrath. As he looked in the distance, he saw that surrounding the Lava Titan was a sea of lava. Only a few lonely boulders poked out like islands above the water.

If he activated an Unknown Transfer Scroll here, he might end up being teleported back into the lava. To avoid this, Nie Yan jumped on a boulder to wait. Lava Roar's silencing effect still had around twenty seconds to go before it expired.

As the ground beneath him was covered by the surging lava, Nie Yan quietly sat on his boulder waiting for time to pass. Watching the roiling waves of molten rock flowing beneath him and the monster raging in the distance made Nie Yan sink into deep thought.

He believed the achievements of today would become a legend, retold countless times in the future.

Kiln Fire Woods had turned into a sea of lava, with all the trees burning up and falling in.

Just how many corpses were buried under the lava?

Nie Yan didn't have any way of knowing. He figured only Unhindered and Victorious Return would have access to these statistics. Of course, they would never reveal it to the public.

But was there really a need to know?

After a while, Nie Yan stood up and lazily stretched his body. He had a pure smile on his face and muttered in a pleased tone, “I did pretty good.”

If Yu Long saw Nie Yan’s expression right now, he would definitely be taken aback. It was vastly different from the cruel smile Nie Yan had shown atop the slope.

Above the rolling lava, Nie Yan activated a Return Scroll. With a flash of radiance, he disappeared from the area.

A video was published on the official forums, titled: ‘The Destruction of Unhindered and Victorious Return!’ In the second round of the battle, both Victorious Return and Unhindered were defeated. Looking back at Asskickers United, aside from all ten members of the strike force being branded with red names, they didn’t suffer a single casualty.

A picture was released as well. It was the group photo of Nie Yan and the others. The image would forever be preserved in the minds of all players. Because of the demise of over 20,000 players from Unhindered and Victorious Return who transformed into brilliant rays of light, the players on the forums would remember the ten faces in the picture. These ten people had created a legend!

From now on, Asskickers United would rise to even greater heights, becoming a mighty entity that none would dare to offend!

All players in the Viridian Empire would know the name of Asskickers United.

The Viridian Empire discussion board of the official forums saw more and more of the events as new videos kept emerging. Players were able to watch through the entire course of events. The emergence of the frightening Lava Titan left everyone breathless. However, what truly captivated them was that unrivalled, graceful strike by Nie Yan. They were thoroughly shocked by such a godly person.

「Godly Thief, Nirvana Flame!」

「Viridian Empire's Number One Thief, Nirvana Flame!」

「Mad Rogue, Nirvana Flame」

Maybe the final nickname was just a bit more resounding, maybe the arrogant cutthroat gesture Nie Yan made toward Hei Zhuo left a deep impression players, or maybe everyone just felt that Nie Yan was completely out of his mind for daring to charge into a crowd of five hundred players for a single kill. Whatever the case, the name stuck and spread like a wildfire across the forums.

The name of the Mad Rogue would become the glory of Asskickers United.

# Chapter 205 – The Hero Returns

## Triumphant

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Nie Yan returned to Calore. Even though such a large commotion occurred in Kiln Fire Woods, the city was still tranquil without the slightest ripple. Yet discussion of the recent events in Kiln Fire Woods could occasionally be heard along the bustling streets.

A large crowd of players were gathered around the transfer area. When Nie Yan emerged, the players all stopped what they were doing and stared at him blankly. His appearance was now very familiar to the public after the release of the video. The crowd immediately identified him as the Mad Rogue, Nirvana Flame. Some people subconsciously took a step back. His name was a deep shade of crimson just like in the video, and he was still enveloped in a dense murderous aura. The arrogant gesture he made atop the slope along with his cruel smile were still fresh in the minds of the players who saw him.

Seeing the reaction of the crowd, Nie Yan knew he had been recognized.

Under the heavens, who does not know of the King? Nie Yan knew that he would no longer be able to stay low-key even if he wished to do so. With that being case, he didn't see the point of trying to hide himself anymore. He confidently unblurred his name, revealing it to the public.

Under the stares of the players, Nie Yan strolled out of the transfer point area toward the guild headquarters of Asskickers United.

Calore was flourishing as before with players passing Nie Yan to-and-thro on the streets.

On the way to the guild headquarters, many players cleared the path for Nie Yan when they spotted him. However, they didn't go away. Instead, they followed behind him some few meters away and discussed in hushed tones.

“That's the Mad Rogue, Nirvana Flame! He's one of the top executives of Asskickers United!”

“I watched the video. I heard over 20,000 players from Unhindered and Victorious Return died in Kiln Fire Woods!”

The scene of Nie Yan killing Hei Zhuo was deeply engraved in the mind of these players. It was almost impossible to forget.

“What a strong Thief!”

Since the release of the video on the forums, the name of the Mad Rogue had a profound impact on the players of the Viridian Empire!

Many people recalled the declaration Nie Yan made on the official forum:「Ten of us are enough to massacre Unhindered!」 Who would've thought that even Victorious Return would be massacred as well! It was precisely Nie Yan who lured out that frightening Lava Titan!

The trailing onlookers stared at his deep crimson name. Just how many players did he kill? They were filled with even greater reverence.

Nie Yan rubbed his nose. He didn't expect to gather such a large crowd of admirers.

「I'm almost at the guild headquarters,」Nie Yan sent a message to Guo Huai.

「Huh, so fast? Just wait. We'll be ready in a moment!」Guo Huai replied in a rushed tone.

「...?」Nie Yan was taken aback. Guo Huai was normally pretty measured in his speech. Why did he suddenly become so incoherent?

A long street about five to six meters wide ran parallel to the guild headquarters. It was lively on most days, filled with the voices of players from the guild. Quite a few non-guild players passed through the area as well, since the location wasn't too far away from the Starry Night Potion Shop.

At this moment, the pedestrians dispersed one after another. A procession of players from Asskickers United walked out and sealed the area off.

More and more players emerged, lining themselves up neatly on



either side of the street. Between them was a path that led directly to the entrance of the guild headquarters.

Familiar figures began entering Nie Yan's eyes: Tuoba Time, Very Forthright, Yu Lan, Bai Kaishui, Natural Fiend, Beginner Student, One Strike Vow, and a lot of people from Withered Leaf. Many among them signed contracts with the guild. Very Forthright and Tuoba Time could be considered guild members as well. Yu Lan and Bai Kaishui were part of the auxiliary teams. Natural Fiend was a Sword Saint in the previous timeline. He only recently joined the guild. Beginner Student was a Magister in the previous timeline. He was already a long-time member of the guild, joining close to its inception. He was relatively reserved. One Strike Vow was a beautiful female Thief player. She was invited to the guild by Resplendent Bladelight. According to rumours, the two of them were very close. At that time, Nie Yan was given a big shock because One Strike Vow was the sole female Shadow Dancer in the previous timeline. She was a goddess in the hearts of countless players. Who would've thought that she and Resplendent Bladelight were actually friends. Nie Yan was more than happy to welcome such a player into the guild.

The first row was composed of a thousand Fighters and Berserkers, all of whom were clad in brilliant sets of Gold or Silver equipment. Grasping greatswords in their hands and covered head to toe in heavy armour, they gave off a powerful, stifling pressure. Behind them were groups of Mages and Priests.

They stood in an orderly fashion to welcome Nie Yan's return. Their dazzling equipment was stunning to behold.

Nie Yan looked on thoughtfully before understanding what was going on. Guo Huai, that sly fox, wanted to take advantage of his return to show off the might of Asskickers United to the public. Since this was all arranged by Guo Huai, he wanted to make sure everything was perfect.

Nie Yan had only recently taken out over twenty thousand players from Victorious Return. Such an ostentatious display would almost certainly strike a nerve with them.

Not bad! This was what you called showing off your own might. If Victorious Return wasn't convinced of their loss, then they were free to bring everything they got!

Nie Yan strolled over, hearing whispers behind his back.

“Damn! They're all wearing full sets of Gold and Silver equipment! Asskickers United sure is rich!” Some players sighed in admiration. This was their first time seeing so many sets of high-grade equipment.

“They really have high-spec equipment!”

“Isn't that Beginner Student? When did he join Asskickers United? I heard he's really amazing. He's ranked third on the Mage leaderboard!”

“That's One Strike Vow! I've seen her before! I saw a video of her wiping out a ten-player party all by herself on the forum. She's in

Asskickers United too!?”

...

The players began to inquire about how many known experts were in Asskickers United. Some individuals even compiled a detailed list of all the powerful players in the guild, then shared it on the forums, so netizens could add anyone that might've been overlooked. Slowly but surely, an unprecedented colossus was revealed to the public. It came to light that the apex of Asskickers United far outnumbered that of several major guilds.

Only now did everyone become truly aware of the strength of Asskickers United.

Even now, Asskickers United had no more than 50,000 members while major guilds like Victorious Return were approaching 100,000. It seemed Asskickers United held true to the declaration made on the forums. They wouldn't rely on an advantage in numbers!

The elites of Asskickers United wouldn't lose out to any major guild!

The position of Victorious Return in the minds of all players was quietly being lowered as Asskickers United ascended the altar.

As the crowd of bystanders looked on, the entire street was lined with Asskickers United players. They displayed discipline and

might like a giant military parade!

As Nie Yan passed by, the Warriors all held their greatswords to their chests. Their movements were timed accordingly. A martial aura filled the air. This was how the Viridian Empire welcomed the return of a hero!

“We welcome Boss Nirvana Flame on his triumphant return!”

“Glory! Might!”

...

The players of Asskickers United cheered so loudly even the deaf could hear them.

Nie Yan was the hero of Asskickers United. He had brought glory to the guild!

The cheering grew more and more frenzied. The deafening voices caused Nie Yan to become fired up.

It was a grand occasion. The guild members all wore stunning equipment. Powerful players appeared one after another, allowing onlookers to directly experience the strength of the guild. This kind of shocking feeling was just like the scene when Nie Yan's group of ten massacred the forces of Unhindered and Victorious Return.

All of Calore was shaken!

All the Asskickers United members proudly displayed the guild emblem on their chests. It was their glory. From now on, they would share the guild's honour and disgrace.

Seeing Nie Yan approach, Guo Huai and a few others greeted him.

“So how did I do?” Guo Huai asked. With this display of might, from now on, no one would dare to look down on the guild!

“You did a good job. It's too bad Bladelight, Young Seven, and them can't be here to see this,” Nie Yan said with regret.

“It can't be helped. They're barred from entering the city.” Tang Yao sighed.

“It'll probably take them at least three or four days to clear their red names,” Nie Yan said. Excluding Young Seven, the kill counts of the others were all above fifty.

“Boss Nirvana Flame is formidable!” shouted the guild members on either side of the street after seeing Nie Yan. All of them were quite emotional.

Watching this group of impassioned players, Tang Yao smiled.

“It’s better if I hand over the position of guild leader back to you. My so-called title of Number One on the Leaderboards isn’t nearly as resounding as your Mad Rogue.”

Nie Yan’s original intention of letting Tang Yao become the guild leader was so that he could keep a low-profile. However, he was now already known to everyone because of the nickname of the Mad Rogue spreading like wildfire on the official forums. It was no longer possible for him to stay hidden.

“I also feel that it’s more appropriate for you to be the guild leader. Your name is already known to everyone, anyway. The name of the Mad Rogue has more rallying power. It’ll be beneficial to the guild’s growth in the future. Besides, it’s the same no matter which one of us brothers take on the role of guild leader. It’s just a position, nothing more,” urged Guo Huai as well.

Nie Yan thought for a moment, then nodded his head. “Alright, I’ll be the guild leader.”

Tang Yao transferred over the position to Nie Yan.

When the rest of the guild members discovered that the guild leader changed to Nie Yan, they let out loud cheers.

“Boss Nirvana Flame is formidable! The guild leader is formidable!”

Nie Yan becoming the guild leader was only natural.

The entire course of events of Nie Yan's welcoming ceremony was recorded and posted online, giving the people on the forums another huge shock. This was Asskickers United flaunting their strength. Truthfully, the formidable strength Asskickers United revealed was extremely stunning!

Netizens started to get into heated discussions about Asskickers United. Their position in the eyes of players had already surpassed established major guilds like Victorious Return and Holy Empire. Many experts even expressed their intentions of joining Asskickers United. For them, a guild filled with powerful experts was extremely attractive. They would have more strong guildmates to compare notes with, so they could improve themselves. Otherwise, the gap between them and the top ranking players would grow wider and wider. Even some professional players who had no interest of being tied down by a guild starting having thoughts of joining Asskickers United. The people who inquired about entering the guild included relatively famous players like Hapless Frog and Aria Sorrow, the rank sixteenth player on the professional leaderboards.

Guo Huai was responsible for negotiation with these players. Asskickers United had very lax restrictions for players of such caliber, offering them extremely generous terms. Because the guild had attracted so many well-known players, thereby bolstering its presence, the recruitment of ordinary players was also progressing smoothly. Due to the number of members slots in the guild being limited, Guo Huai found himself continuously raising the minimum requirements. However, the guild headquarters was still packed as ever, being flooded with an endless stream of new applicants.

Expand! Expand! Expand! After which they would ruthlessly crush Victorious Return!

Asskickers United was growing into a powerful entity that no one dared to offend. Meanwhile, their sworn enemy, Victorious Return, was unusually silent. They didn't release a single statement. In the past, their players would frequently hurl abuse at those from Asskickers United on the forums. However, now, they had completely disappeared. Even their presence in the game became extremely scarce.

However, beneath this tranquility lay a strong undercurrent ready to surge forth. It was simply the calm before the storm. Even though Victorious Return had been ruthlessly beaten down, and they wouldn't do anything for the time being, Nie Yan knew that they would never let this matter go so easily.



## Chapter 206 – Unrivalled Godly Staff

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While celebrations at the guild headquarters kicked into full gear, Nie Yan was leisurely attending to his own affairs. He glanced at his kill count—155. Before he sent Bladelight, Young Seven, and the others away, it had already surpassed 80. Later on, in order to draw the forces of Victorious Return to the center of Kiln Fire Woods, he killed no small number of players. At that time, he was consumed in a murderous frenzy. Coupled with his frightening attack power, almost no one from Victorious Return or Unhindered could survive more than three exchanges with him.

Nie Yan's biggest harvest from the war with Victorious Return and Unhindered was the flash of insight which allowed him to finally understand the fundamental difference between a Great Thief and a Shadow Dancer. He broke through that layer of restraint, improving greatly in skill.

In order to become the first to receive the Shadow Dancer title in the future, he would have to lay down a solid foundation. The first Shadow Dancer would receive additional rewards.

It's about time I start clearing my red name... Nie Yan mused. He still had to fulfill his promise of getting Bladelight, Young Seven, and the others to Level 30 as well.

Nie Yan sorted out his inventory. He tossed any unneeded equipment into the guild treasury, then took out the Grimmar Soul Staff to appraise.

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## Sealed Grimmar Soul Staff (Legendary)

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Requirements: 1,000 Intelligence, 100 Strength, 100 Dexterity

Description: The sealed Grimmar Soul Staff still possesses incredible destructive power. You must find all other pieces of the set to remove the seal.

Set Items: Grimmar Soul Staff, Grimmar Necklace, Grimmar Ring, Grimmar Elemental Robes

Properties: Magic Power 3,602–3,703, Willpower +50, Focus +50, Ignore level +30, Mana +300%, Mana Recovery Rate +300%, Skill Cooldowns -80% (Excludes: Forbidden Magic)

Elemental Remerge: Activate to increase all Elemental Magic Damage by 300%. Consume mana to summon an Elemental Familiar. The capability of the summon is determined by the caster's Willpower.

Note: The owner must have the approval of Countess Alicia to take full advantage of the staff; otherwise, the properties of the staff will be reduced by 50%. Countess Alicia has the right to retake the staff.

It was exactly what you would expect out of a Legendary staff. Even Mages with above-average stats would still have wait until they were Level 70–80 before they could equip it. A thousand Intelligence was no joke! Its Magic Power was equally frightening

too! However, so long the Lava Titan wasn't slain, the staff's properties were greatly reduced, making it no better than an ordinary high-level weapon.

The final line was also something to take note of: "Countess Alicia has the right to retake the staff." In other words, whoever awakened Countess Alicia would be able to obtain the Grimmar Soul Staff. Nie Yan couldn't truly be considered the owner of the staff.

It couldn't be equipped by anyone for now. Even the strongest Mages at present were a far cry away from meeting the 1,000 Intelligence requirement.

Nie Yan thought for a moment. He placed the staff in the guild treasury, then set its price to 3,000,000 merit points.

As soon as the Grimmar Soul Staff entered the treasury, it was plastered right at the top, available for everyone in the guild to see.

The players immediately went into an uproar when they saw the properties of the staff.

"What the hell!? You can even get something like that!? My God! That's a Legendary item!"

The Grimmar Soul Staff had a frightening requirement of 1,000 Intelligence. It was simply looking down on all Elementalists with contempt! As for the sky-high price, the players were rolling their

eyes so much they could practically see inside the back of their heads! Just how much would they have to donate to amass 3,000,000 merit points?

The guild chat flooded with complaints.

「Boss! You're really too much! A person really shouldn't behave so shamelessly! You put up such a godly staff in the treasury, knowing full well that none of us can come up with the merit points to afford it! Isn't that just plain bullying?」whined an Elementalist in the guild chat.

「Yeah! Boss, where did you get an item like that?」

「What a godly staff!」

「Guild Leader, you really can't tease us like this!」

Ever since Nie Yan returned, the atmosphere in the guild showed drastic improvement. Add this to the fact that Guo Huai had swept through and booted out a bunch of people who harboured malicious intentions from their ranks, and the guild as a whole reached an unprecedented degree of unity. “After a nation weathers a storm, its people will grow ever stronger and united!” These words were perfectly suited for describing the current state of Asskickers United.

Nie Yan chuckled before replying.「I didn't put the Grimmar Soul Staff in the treasury simply to tease you guys. It was to tell you all

that if any Elementalist in the guild becomes a Magister, the staff will go to them. Getting the approval of Countess Alicia shouldn't be anything difficult either. When the guild grows more powerful, we'll even help that person collect the entire Grimmar Set. You have my word!」

The Grimmar Soul Staff was a Legendary Item, and despite being sealed its properties were still much higher than those of an ordinary Sub-Legendary Item. It fully deserved to be called a godly staff! If the seal was removed, it could unleash even more devastating might. Any Elementalist wielding it would possess the power to annihilate an entire city!

Geared up with a set of Legendary equipment, just how amazing would that be?

The properties of the Grimmar Soul Staff were seen and shared by the players of the guild.

The Elementalists couldn't help but feel their hearts throb. Their new goal was to become the first Magister in the guild!

「Boss! These are your words! You better keep your promise!」

「I've already remembered the boss' words. Magister, eh? Piece of cake!」

「...」

The players in the guild chat cracked jokes with one another.

「My word doesn't only apply to Elementalists. As your guild leader, if any of you can reach the peak of your respective class, I will help that person obtain a set of godly equipment!」Nie Yan said in the guild chat. He understood full well the gravity of his statement. Although he knew where to get godly equipment, actually obtaining them was a different story.

If Nie Yan waited until players in the guild developed into Templars, Sword Saints, Magisters, Archbishops, Shadow Dancers, and so on, it still wouldn't be too late for them to slowly amass godly equipment.

The potential of the players in Asskickers United was much higher than those in any of the other guilds. Back then, it was precisely because Holy Empire had a Templar and Sword Saint that they dared to challenge the Lava Titan. When Asskickers United truly grew into a powerhouse in the later stages of the game, why would they fear not being able to deal with a mere Lava Titan?

「Nie Yan, should we organize an expedition?」Guo Huai asked. Now was the best time to start a guild activity. The conditions were ripe. Although they would probably suffer some damage, they would still make some decent gains, not to mention tighten the bonds between the guild members and improve everyone's cooperation.

Every so often, large guilds like Victorious Return and Holy Empire would set out on an expedition to hunt a Lord-class monster. Lord-class monsters often dropped decent Dark Gold-

grade equipment or skill books which could greatly increase the strength of the guild's top players. An expedition was also a good excuse for the guild leader to dish out some merit points.

Asskickers United still hadn't carried out a large-scale guild activity. So far, every time someone suggested one, they would immediately be shot down due to lingering fears of being ambushed by Victorious Return. However, at the present moment, the morale of the guild members was at its highest and new recruits were constantly flowing in. Their rising momentum simply couldn't be contained! It would be a little inappropriate if they didn't start a guild expedition now.

「Mhmm... No, not yet. Don't worry, I'll consider the matter. Tell the guild members to focus on levelling for now. Those who haven't reached Level 25 by the time we set out won't be able to participate. We start when 600 guild members have reached Level 25 or higher. Every participating player will receive 500 merit points. I'll be taking part in the expedition as well,」Nie Yan replied. He already had an idea of which Lord-class monster the guild would hunt. As for giving out so many merit points, thanks to the efforts of the guild members, the treasury had grown to become as abundant as mother nature. The current Asskickers United didn't lack gold or resources.

「That's a pretty good method. It'll encourage the guild members to diligently level. When they find out you're going to be participating in the expedition, they'll definitely go wild with excitement!」Guo Huai smiled. He passed down Nie Yan's words to the rest of the guild.

Guo Huai's announcement immediately triggered shock waves throughout the guild.

「The boss is participating too!」

「The guild leader is taking part in the expedition. I can't miss it!」

At present, very few players in the guild were Level 25 or higher. Even though many low-level guild members were far from reaching the cut off mark, they still held a little bit of hope in their hearts. As a result, the entire guild sank into a levelling frenzy.

「I'm still six levels away from Level 25! Which big brother wants to carry me!?!」

「...」

The players of Asskickers United began levelling like madmen. Right now, the guild was far from having 600 players who were Level 25 or higher. It would take at least three or four days before the expedition could be carried out.

「What about Victorious Return's main team? Did we catch them?」 Nie Yan asked. If Asskickers United could deal them another decisive blow, not even a large guild like them could recover from such a huge setback.

「No. After they were defeated in Kiln Fire Woods, they grew even more cautious. Our Thief Task Force had an almost perfect



opportunity to surround them. But we still chose not to act in the end. We still aren't at full fighting strength yet,」Guo Huai replied. They were still in the recruiting phase, and the entire framework for the Hundred Thief Task Force wasn't completed yet. It wasn't too suitable to act at this time. He was extremely prudent regarding this matter. If they didn't act, they could always continue waiting. However, if they did act, they had to achieve their goal perfectly!

「Not acting right now was the correct decision. If we can't ensure success, we're better off waiting for another opportunity. Asskickers United is on an upward trend while Victorious Return is on a decline. Just hold in our resentment and keep waiting. Sooner or later, we'll crush them. It's not necessary for us to go at them with everything we've got right now,」Nie Yan said. Guo Huai was still quite reliable at handling affairs.

While chatting with Guo Huai, Nie Yan entered the Starry Night Potion Shop. Its size had grown larger and larger. Under his directions, Bird spent another 60 gold to upgrade the shop to Tier 5, adding another floor to the shop for a total of five floors and greatly expanding the size of every floor. It now resembled a magnificent mansion. The main floor was capable of holding 600–700 players. The second floor was turned into a warehouse. The third, fourth, and fifth floors were filled with workshops. There were now over 800 well-known Alchemists working at the Starry Night Potion Shop. Each one was given a 50 square-meter workshop. For the time being, it was already more than enough for them to use.

Nie Yan looked at the money inside the Starry Night Potion Shop. According to the report in the information window, the shop had

made more than 500 gold over the past few days. He thought for a moment before withdrawing 300 gold from the shop. If he wanted to honour his promise to Bladelight, Young Seven, and the others, he would need to spend at least this much.

## Chapter 207 – Killer’s Demonic Medallion

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Upon seeing Nie Yan, Bird promptly came over to greet him. He wore silvery-white Alchemist robes with an ornate design on the collar—a golden redbud beneath a silver feather. This special symbol was the mark of an Intermediate Alchemist.

“Boss, you’ve come!” Bird said with pleasant surprise.

“You’ve been promoted to Intermediate Alchemist?” Nie Yan was slightly surprised as well. Bird had plenty to do every day just managing the Starry Night Potion Shop, but he somehow still found the time to raise his Alchemy skill to become an Intermediate Alchemist.

“My Intermediate Alchemist proficiency is already at half. In the entire shop, only three people are ahead of me,” Bird proudly reported. Considering he had less time to practice than the dedicated Alchemists in the shop, not falling behind the pack would’ve already been a remarkable achievement.

The Alchemy King’s rise had finally begun. Maybe he would give Nie Yan a nice surprise in the future.

“Business seems to be booming,” Nie Yan commented as he looked around at the hundreds of players crowding the Starry Night Potion Shop.

“Potion sales have been especially high these past few days, netting around 300 gold in profits daily. We’ve also provided over

600 gold's worth of potions to Asskickers United in that time. Our three branches in Calore have also begun to earn over a hundred gold a day. According to your instructions, we're working on opening thirty-two Starry Night Potion Shop branches in six other cities. After we contacted the local bosses of those cities, they've all agreed to not disrupt our business for now. We've already started recruiting Alchemists, but those branches won't be bringing in profits for quite some time." Bird diligently reported on the profits and expansions of the store.

Nie Yan nodded and praised, "Very good!" He was extremely satisfied with Bird's work managing the store.

"You've given me everything, Boss, so I naturally have to produce good results," Bird replied seriously. Solely due to Nie Yan's benevolence, he had completely reversed his previous situation. The complete turnaround from being cast out from Dark Hero as a failed Apprentice Alchemist to his current position as both an Intermediate Alchemist and the manager of the Starry Night Potion Shop caused Bird to feel deeply grateful toward Nie Yan. Just a few days ago, Dark Hero's guild leader even came in person to invite him back to the guild, but Bird flatly refused his very generous offer. People should not forget their benefactors, after all.

"How many Intermediate Alchemists do we have now?" Nie Yan asked.

"We have eleven now. According to my best estimations, there's only sixteen Intermediate Alchemists in all of Calore, so we employ two-thirds of them," Bird responded. Calore was currently the

frontrunner in both the number of players in the Viridian Empire and the most robust economy. Even from the perspective of the entire Viridian Empire, the Starry Night Potion Shop was the undisputed leader of the potion industry. “Do you want to meet our Intermediate Alchemists? They’re all extremely curious about the secret backer behind the Starry Night Potion Shop.”

“Not right now,” Nie Yan answered. Bird was good at doing business. So long as Asskickers United provided high-level recipes, the Starry Night Potion Shop would continue to grow. “When I have some spare time, I’ll meet with them.”

“Alright,” Bird nodded.

After chatting a bit more, Nie Yan left the Starry Night Potion Shop. He withdrew 200 gold from his share of the Union of Assassins’ profits and headed to Tasoyi Village, where he bought a thousand Basic Magic Bombs and some Smoke Powder. This time, they would grind Mechanical Golems in Everlasting City to their hearts desire.

「Damn! Undying Scoundrel just got a Killer’s Demonic Medallion! Why is my luck so bad?」Tang Yao sent a message to complain to Nie Yan. He had farmed Scaled Frogs for so long without any luck, but Undying Scoundrel got one to drop almost immediately. How could Tang Yao not feel frustrated? It could even be said he was saltier than the Dead Sea!

「I think your kill count might not have been high enough. Undying Scoundrel killed over a hundred players.」Nie Yan was finally certain that the Killer’s Demonic Medallion required a red

named player to have killed over a hundred players in order to drop. Of course, even then, luck still played a factor.

「Had I known that earlier, I would've just killed a few more of those bastards from Victorious Return!」Tang Yao sighed. Back when he unleashed a massacre outside the Black Flame Forest dungeon, his kill count had only been a little short of a hundred. Thinking back now, it was really a pity.

「Share the properties of Killer's Demonic Medallion for me to look at.」Killer's Demonic Medallions were different for each class. Because Undying Scoundrel was an Elementalist, his medallion should be for a Mage.

「Mhm.」Tang Yao grunted as he shared the properties of the medallion.

Killer's Demonic Medallion (Mage)

Rank: Junior (Kill 1000 players 2 Levels higher than you to upgrade to Intermediate.)

Description: The Killer's Demonic Medallion can be upgraded by killing players. But with each subsequent upgrade, the owner will suffer a stronger curse that reduces defense.

Properties: Magic Power +20%, Defense -20%, Willpower +5, Ignore Level +3, Armour Pierce

Junior Elemental Blast: Fire an elemental missile that deals three times your Magic Power as damage. Cooldown: 10 minutes.

Junior Elemental Drain: Drains 60 mana from a single target each second, up to 50% of their maximum mana. Cooldown: 3 minutes.

Restrictions: Can only be used by the original owner. Automatically bound after being picked up. Cannot be traded or dropped. Can be destroyed.

The Killer's Demonic Medallion would bind itself automatically, so only the player who got it to drop would be able to use it. Other players could only look on in envy. It counted as an accessory, and took up an accessory slot. This item was very good, and considered by many to be one of the absolute best.

「What a perverted item! Willpower +5 and Ignore Level +3, with an armour-piercing property that deals 120% damage to light armored units to boot! Such a pity.」Tang Yao was green with envy over this item.

A Thief's Killer's Demonic Medallion would be different from that of a Mage. Nie Yan looked at his own killcount. It's more than enough. I'll first go hunt some Scaled Frogs to get my own Killer's Demonic Medallion, then.

「Just form a party with other guild members and hunt down

some Victorious Return players before you try again at getting a Killer's Demonic Medallion. Killing them is nothing to you anyway. We can't let Unhindered off either. They ought to be slaughtered until they never dare to show their faces again.」After a bit of consideration, Nie Yan advised Tang Yao to go after this highly useful item. The boost to Ignore Level was especially important to him. If Tang Yao could equip more items with Ignore Level, they could continue to jump levels and fight more high-level monsters.

「That works too. Anyways, Heaven Breaker shouldn't even dream about taking me over anytime soon.」To Tang Yao, the Killer's Demonic Medallion was the devil's fishhook.

「You be careful then. I'm about to go grab myself a Killer's Demonic Medallion.」

「Your kill count is high enough?」

「I killed over a 150 players in Kiln Fire Woods.」

「You sure are vicious. A shame I wasn't there,」Tang Yao sadly complained.

Nie Yan laughed.「That was for safety's sake. We still have to go do a quest.」He had been planning this operation, which required the use of both the Adjudicator of God and Steal skills to complete, for quite some time. Now that he had the Kiln Fire Heart, he had even more confidence. It was also a Legendary item fragment, but the Grimmar Soul set was even better. He couldn't possibly let this



opportunity go! As for the Silent Bay and the Ten Holy Paladins Legendary questline, those had to wait until he was a higher level. Trying to complete it now would just be suicide.

Nie Yan exited the city, heading towards the area where Scaled Frogs spawned. While walking through the forest, he got another message, this time from Sleepy Fox.

「Your actions this time were insane! You sure are amazing, burying over twenty thousand Victorious Return players under Kiln Fire Woods,」Sleepy Fox exclaimed. He had expected Asskickers United to be suppressed because of Victorious Return's absolute advantage. He hadn't expected Nie Yan to find a Lava Titan from who-knows-where to completely massacre Victorious Return. It instantly flipped the situation, silencing Victorious Return and setting Asskickers United on track to grow even more prosperous with each passing day.

「We got lucky, is all.」Nie Yan lightly chuckled.

「What are you saying? How could it just be luck? I really admire your ability, especially the part where you dove into that crowd of 600 players to kill Hei Zhuo. You displayed a godly level of skill!」Sleepy Fox gave his heartfelt praise. He wasn't trying to butter up to Nie Yan. He sincerely believed what Nie Yan had accomplished in Kiln Fire Woods could be performed by no other.

「With all this flattery, it can't be that you have some kind of hidden motive can it?」Nie Yan laughed. From his understanding, Sleepy Fox was an extremely cunning figure [who would never visit a temple without a cause](#).

To “never visit a temple without a cause” is an idiom meaning to have a hidden motive. Instead of going to a temple to worship, one would go for some other, secular reason.

Sleepy Fox blushed as he coughed to hide his embarrassment before continuing.「I came with good intentions to tell you about some news I got. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame have been making frequent movements lately. Their leaders are often in contact with each other, and there's even hints of them being in contact with Angel Corps from the Satreen Empire. Do not look down on Victorious Return.」

Nie Yan, after hearing Sleepy Fox's information, wrinkled his brows. He wasn't worried about Angel Corps because the Satreen Empire was just too far from the Viridian Empire. It was simply impossible for them to mobilize a large-scale force here. Radiant Sacred Flame, on the other hand, was truly worrying because it was a major guild comparable to Victorious Return or Holy Empire.

「I contacted you today to talk of an alliance. If Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame make a move, we can stand united, both advancing and retreating together.」Sleepy Fox finally brought up the real purpose behind his words.

Advancing and retreating together, huh? Nie Yan's cunning eyes gleamed as he questioned,「Could it be that you're on bad terms with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame and are now trying to drag Asskickers United into the mess?」

Having been exposed, Sleepy Fox chuckled wryly and admitted,

「Only a minor conflict. Asskickers United can't just passively defend itself forever, right? I heard they're going to open a small stronghold soon. Are you guys interested in it?」

Sleepy Fox had taken the initiative to contact Nie Yan about an alliance, showing that Holy Empire recognized Asskickers United's strength.

After carefully considering for a bit, Nie Yan responded,「I agree that Holy Empire and Asskickers United should cooperate, but we need to flesh out the details of such an alliance.」

Although Asskickers United was on the rise, the guild was only a single entity. If it could find some trustworthy allies, not only would morale be boosted but their future development would also be smoother.

## Chapter 208 – Mutual Defense Pact

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Nie Yan needed to find some reliable allies, and the interests of Asskickers United and Holy Empire were already intertwined due to the existence of the Union of Assassins. On top of that, both guilds had faced pressure from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame in the past. He had similar thoughts. In order to stand a chance against Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, Asskickers United and Holy Empire would inevitably have to form an alliance. The crucial point was what kind?

「There's many ways we can cooperate in, and we can form mutual trust by exchanging shares in our guilds,」Sleepy Fox suggested. He was probing Nie Yan's attitude toward an alliance.

An exchange of shares? When Cao Xu started investing in Conviction during the previous timeline, he was able to seize control of Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Alliance of Mages, Divine Protectors, and Bloodlust Blades in a short time specifically because he owned a stake in all of them. This brought the five major guilds all under the umbrella of the Cao Xu Century Financial Group, giving birth to an unparalleled colossus. Because Holy Empire, Sapphire Shrine, and the other major guilds weren't willing to become Cao Xu's puppets, they were forced to take a passive stance.

Owning a stake in each other's guilds really was the best way to establish trust!

Feeling that Nie Yan was taking his time to reply, Sleepy Fox continued,「The Victorious Return you've encountered so far is

merely the tip of the iceberg, nothing more. They aren't isolated to Calore. They have many other branches in other cities. It's just that it isn't feasible to mobilize those forces from so far away. However, when everyone gets mounts later on, they'll be able to quickly reinforce each other from various locations. At that time, the strength of Victorious Return will increase by several-fold. The same also holds true for Radiant Sacred Flame. As for how many members they really have spread over the Viridian Empire, even I can't say for sure. It isn't simply because of luck that these large guilds can exist for so long without being toppled by others.」

Sleepy Fox's words contained an element of warning. No doubt, Asskickers United had become an almost unrivalled existence in Calore by defeating Victorious Return at Kiln Fire Woods. However, if Nie Yan believed Asskickers United could suppress Victorious Return right now, then his way of thinking was too naive, and he would bring about the destruction of his own guild.

Nie Yan naturally understood the point Sleepy Fox was trying to get across. He had experienced for himself just how overbearingly arrogant Victorious Return could get during the previous timeline. However, he was confident that Asskickers United would surpass them in the future.

「How do you propose we form this alliance?」Nie Yan asked. He wanted to listen to what Sleepy Fox had to say.

「I'm willing to exchange a 10% stake in Holy Empire for a 30% stake in Asskickers United,」Sleepy Fox replied, pausing slightly before continuing,「When I say a 10% stake in Holy Empire, I don't just mean the main branch in Calore but rather the entire guild

spread out across the Viridian Empire.」He was reminding Nie Yan that Holy Empire possessed a deep foundation in the game. Taking a 30% share of Asskickers United wasn't him trying to short-end Nie Yan.

Nie Yan faintly smiled.「How many branches does Holy Empire have? How many members?」

「33 branches. Altogether there are over 300,000 members scattered throughout various cities; they won't be mobilized until some time in the future,」Sleepy Fox replied. These branches were the reserve forces of Holy Empire, and he could call on them when the scope of conflict inevitably expanded later on. Then there was Asskickers United. Aside from their dominance in Calore, they didn't have a presence anywhere else.

Nie Yan naturally had his own considerations. Calore was the capital of the Viridian Empire, the focal point of most conflicts. Over 90% of the elites were gathered here. What he wanted for Asskickers United wasn't frantic expansion like Victorious Return or Holy Empire. So what if the other side had more people?

On the path to dominance, what was it that ultimately mattered? It was which side had the greater number of elites! How else could 50,000 members of Battle Crazy Alliance have resisted the onslaught of 600,000 players from Victorious Return and Bloodlust Blades during the previous timeline? In the future, 100,000 members were enough for Asskickers United to contend against all the other guilds.

Nie Yan didn't express any opinion on the information Sleepy

Fox provided. Instead, he smiled, changing the subject yet again, 「You don't feel like you're losing out? Asskickers United only has 50,000 members while Holy Empire has over 300,000. Even down the road, we'll have 100,000 members at most, but I assume Holy Empire's force will surpass 1,000,000.」

Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Holy Empire, Sapphire Shrine, and the rest would all eventually become massive guilds with over 1,000,000 members. However, Nie Yan's end goal was to temper 100,000 players into a mighty elite force that could rival a million players! This was what he wanted to accomplish!

「Asskickers United isn't planning to absorb a large number of players?」Sleepy Fox asked in shock. Based on the current development speed of Asskickers United, he believed they would soon break through the 70,000 member threshold. Amassing 1,000,000 players a few years from now would be no problem for them at all.

「The future Asskickers United absolutely won't surpass 100,000 members. In fact, it might even have fewer. Guild size doesn't necessarily equate to strength,」Nie Yan replied. Fewer members meant everyone could enjoy more of the guild's resources. And fueled by his strong financial backing, every member would become elites among elites.

Sleepy Fox paused for a moment to gather his thoughts. Asskickers United had the perfect opportunity to greatly expand, but why were they not taking it? Just what was Nie Yan planning? He had a hard time understanding what was going through Nie Yan's mind.

「In my opinion, you alone are worth a 5% share of Holy Empire. I'm willing to take a step back. A 10% stake in Holy Empire for a 20% stake in Asskickers United. What do you think?」Sleepy Fox didn't know why, but he got the feeling Nie Yan was confident in defeating Victorious Return. Although he didn't know where this confidence originated from, he was willing to make a gamble on Nie Yan.

Nie Yan shook his head.「You still don't get what I'm trying to say. In the future, Asskickers United will be an unrivalled and unique existence among the major guilds. I'm not willing to sell a large number of the guild's share. Even if you offered me a 30% stake in Holy Empire for a 10% stake in Asskickers United, I still wouldn't agree. As for the topic of exchanging shares, I'm willing to transfer over a 3% stake in my guild to you at most, nothing more. We can still discuss an alliance. After all, our guilds already share numerous interests. We go through adversity and prosperity in tandem.」

Sleepy Fox didn't expect his offer to be turned down. Did Nie Yan really have that much confidence in his guild? He began reexamining the worth of Asskickers United. After a while, he finally made a decision.「Since you're not willing to transfer over too many shares of your guild, I can offer a 5% share of Holy Empire for a 3% share of your guild. Other than that, you'll have to take an honorary executive position in Holy Empire. How does that sound? 」An exchange of 5% and 3% shares in each other's guilds was merely a token gesture. What would take place next was the most important. Sleepy Fox wanted to borrow the name of the Mad Rogue to give a boost to Holy Empire's prestige. He felt Nie Yan's reputation was worth more than a 5% share of his guild.



Nie Yan considered the offer for a moment. Since he wouldn't have to assume any responsibility, he didn't mind accepting the position of an honorary executive.

「Alright, I agree.」Nie Yan nodded. They ironed out the details for the proposed cooperation of the two guilds, including things like a mutual defense pact: If one side suffered an attack from an enemy, the other side had to intervene.

In order to avoid provoking a response from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, they didn't reveal the alliance to the public for the time being. However, news of Nie Yan holding an honorary executive position in Holy Empire would definitely spread rapidly.

On a different note, Nie Yan also exchanged some information with Fa Lan and Kill Love, the respective leaders of Sapphire Shrine and Battle Crazy Alliance. However, no substantial talks toward cooperation were made.

Nie Yan took a quick look at the Union of Assassins chat server. It had grown quite large with over 5,000 members—of whom more than 3,000 were barons and over 20 were viscounts—generating over 100 gold a day! He, Sleepy Fox, Fa Lan, and Kill Love all received a decent profit. His own earnings already surpassed 300 gold in total. He had withdrawn 200 gold for himself. The rest was given to Guo Huai to develop the guild.

Guo Huai got started on the relevant arrangements after being

informed of the alliance with Holy Empire.

Nie Yan arrived at the Scaled Frog spawn area where he met up with Yao Yao, Yu Lan, Undying Scoundrel, and the others.

“Boss, you’ve finally come. We were all waiting for you to take us levelling!” Undying Scoundrel said after spotting Nie Yan.

“Nirvana Flame, you’re here.” Yao Yao’s mood brightened. She didn’t know why she felt so happy when Nie Yan was around.

Yao Yao’s rosy cheeks were bright like red clouds at sunrise. For some inexplicable reason, whenever Nie Yan saw Yao Yao’s brilliant smile, he couldn’t help but think of Xie Yao. He fell into an absentminded daze. It was almost as though Xie Yao were standing in front of him right now. Shaking his head, he dispelled his mind of such strange thoughts. Recalling that he would be able to see Xie Yao again in a few days, his heart was steeped with longing and anticipation.

“I watched the video of you guys in Kiln Fire Woods. You were really amazing! Moon Child even told me that you’re her new idol. Many of my classmates also recognize you. You’re famous!” Yao Yao exclaimed. She couldn’t help but feel proud of Nie Yan. The Mad Rogue was renowned in the Viridian Empire!

Nie Yan felt a tinge of warmth at seeing Yao Yao’s enthusiasm.

“What level are you now?”

“I’m Level 25 now. The experience here is really great!” She raised an eyebrow in surprise after noticing Nie Yan’s calm expression, and exclaimed “Hey! Now that you’re so popular, aren’t you even a little proud?”

“What’s there to be proud about?” Nie Yan smiled.

Yao Yao immediately pouted. “Bah! You’re just as boring as an old uncle!” she berated him in a dissatisfied tone.

What Yao Yao didn’t know was that while Nie Yan had the appearance of an immature adult, he really did have the mind of an old uncle nearing his thirties! He truly didn’t feel this matter was worth getting excited about.

Blowhard Summer Bug and the rest arrived. They had dropped what they were doing after hearing Nie Yan was in the area. One by one, they came up to greet him.

“Boss!”

“Hey, Boss!”

“Good to see you guys,” Nie Yan greeted back with a smile.

With her limpid eyes, Yao Yao stared at these players, then back at Nie Yan in surprise. When she first met up with Blowhard

Summer Bug, Undying Scoundrel, and the others, she could tell that they were competitive individuals who weren't willing to submit to others. After seeing Nie Yan, each one of them had a sparkle in their eyes; clearly they respected him deeply. How else could Nie Yan have taken in such a group of unyielding characters as subordinates? He was truly a mystifying person. She felt another twinge of curiosity toward him in her heart, as well as a growing admiration.

## Chapter 209 – Skill Of A Shadow Dancer

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“You guys should stay here a while longer to clear your red names. When we’re all good, I’ll take everyone to go levelling with me,” Nie Yan said. He could only wait until they were no longer branded as PKers to bring them to Everlasting City; otherwise, they would be besieged by guards as soon as they set foot in Calore.

There weren’t enough Sub-Elite and Elite Scaled Frogs to go around, so most were left hunting ordinary Scaled Frogs.

“Boss, your name is also red. How come you can enter the city without being attacked?” Summer Bug voiced out his doubts.

“When your Influence in Calore reaches 30 points, you can walk around freely with a red name,” Nie Yan replied. A player had to complete many high-difficulty quests to accumulate that much Influence. He felt such an undertaking was too difficult for the vast majority of player base at the current stage of the game.

“It’s that difficult...? My Influence in Calore is only at 2 points. I got them from helping an NPC in a quest, but completing that damned thing nearly drove me mad!” Undying Scoundrel couldn’t help but lament, rolling his eyes back in shock.

The others also felt exasperated at Nie Yan’s revelation. Unless they encountered some sort of quest with amazing rewards, getting 30 Influence was temporarily out of the scope of their ability.

“Keep farming Scaled Frogs. We’ll set off when you’ve all cleared

your red names,” Nie Yan said. He specifically bought 1,000 Magic Bombs to power level them directly to Level 30. It was enough to let them level up to their heart’s content.

Most of the group dispersed to continue grinding Scaled Frogs, leaving behind Nie Yan, Yao Yao, Yu Lan, and Bai Kaishui.

Nie Yan chatted with them for a while about the previous incident outside of Black Flame Forest. Back then, they fought side by side, killing many enemy players. Yu Lan wasn’t able to make it to the end, however, dropping several levels and losing all her gear. The guild was able to provide her with a new set of equipment, and she was now Level 23 thanks to the efforts of Yao Yao. With this, the strength of the Blue Feather Team also slowly recovered.

“I still haven’t personally thanked you for last time,” Nie Yan said to Yu Lan and Bai Kaishui.

“It’s nothing, Boss. The incident last time only happened because a member of our team sold you out. Even though that person is gone, it was still our fault to some degree,” Bai Kaishui said in a serious tone.

Yu Lan nodded in agreement. The calamity that befell her team—especially the betrayal—caused her to be deeply aggrieved. Fortunately, her team had fully recovered by now, and with the backing of Asskickers United, they achieved even more success than before. Joining Nie Yan’s guild could also be considered a good outcome birthed from a setback.

“Alright, let’s not linger on unpleasant matters.” Nie Yan laughed. He glanced at the surroundings, then turned to Yao Yao and asked, “Why didn’t I see Sun?”

“He went scouting for Sub-Elites and Elites. I’ll send him a whisper,” Yao Yao replied. Only now did she realize that she hadn’t seen him in quite a while.

“It’s fine. Let’s go hunt Scaled Frogs for the time being,” Nie Yan said. He wanted to see if he could get a Slaughter Fiend Medallion to drop.

The group of players scattered around the map to hunt monsters. With their strength, they were picking off the ordinary Scaled Frogs like it was child’s play. However, this was only to be expected. After all, the quality of their equipment wasn’t any bit inferior to that of the top players from the large guilds!

Nie Yan found a corner where he holed himself up in to fight Scaled Frogs. After comprehending the mysteries of a Shadow Dancer, he started applying some of the techniques he remembered from his past life in combat.

Under the frightening onslaught of Nie Yan’s attacks, Scaled Frogs collapsed to the ground one after another. He was simply too fast, leaving behind only after-images whenever he attacked. None of them could even get close, let alone land a hit on him.

After downing his sixteenth Scaled Frog, Nie Yan moved toward

a clearing up ahead where he discovered five Scaled Frogs gathered in close proximity. He pondered for a moment before revealing a fearless smirk. With a flick of the wrist, he switched to a forward grip with the dagger, then dashed toward them.

Out of the blue, Nie Yan reemerged behind one of the Scaled Frogs. He struck it in the back of the head with Smothering Strike, then followed up with Assassinate and Lacerate. The Scaled Frog let out a miserable croak, as a huge chunk of health was shaved away, before turning around and pouncing on its assailant

Alerted by Nie Yan's presence, the other four Scaled Frogs sprung on him as well.

Nie Yan's silhouette was ethereal like a ghost as he passed through the opening between the five Scaled Frogs. With a Vital Strike followed by a combo of stabs and slashes, he took down the already less than half-health Scaled Frog.

"One down!" Nie Yan spun around, dodging the attacks of the four remaining Scaled Frogs in quick succession as he darted forward. Locking onto the next target, he smashed one of them in the forehead with a Concussive Blow. His silhouette blurred into motion, then reappeared behind the stunned Scaled Frog. Backstab! Eviscerate! He sped back a few paces without pause, avoiding the tongue lashes of the other Scaled Frogs.

Despite being surrounded on all four sides, Nie Yan effortlessly evaded the attacks of the Scaled Frogs. His face showed no trace of panic. It was almost as though he were merely taking a leisurely stroll.



The four Scaled Frogs hadn't landed a single hit on him. He was as slippery as a louch, perfectly taking advantage of every opening between each attack to evade.

The difference between a Shadow Dancer and a Great Thief was that while a Great Thief could display 100% of their ability, a Shadow Dancer could display 200% or even 300%. They were able to utilize every single stat point to its fullest to bring about the greatest effect.

Even with the same speed, level, stats, and gear quality, a Great Thief couldn't hold a candle against a Shadow Dancer!

Damage values continuously floated up above the Scaled Frog's head until only a small chunk of health was left. The creature collapsed to the ground as Nie Yan finished it off with a few attacks.

"Two down!" All of Nie Yan's skills were already on cooldown. He employed simple steps to avoid the attacks of the remaining three Scaled Frogs, simultaneously stabbing and slashing as he left behind several wounds on them before rapidly retreating again.

The three Scaled Frogs continuously lunged at Nie Yan as a string of damage values rose over each of their heads. However, regardless of how hard they tried, they couldn't touch so much as a single hair on his body. It was like a player with only 10 Accuracy trying to land a hit on an opponent with over 100 Evasion. Even if they pulled out all stops, all they'd end up seeing would be a

continuous row of MISS.

Nie Yan finally understood why the Magisters of his past life looked down on Great Thieves but were so deathly afraid of Shadow Dancers. It was simply that the latter belonged on a whole nother plane of skill! He had heard of many cases where a Magister ended up dying to a Shadow Dancer on the battlefield, even under the protection of several hundred players. However, he had never heard of a Great Thief accomplishing a similar feat.

The boundary between a Shadow Dancer and Great Thief was like the difference between heaven and earth!

When the bleed and poison effects wore off, Nie Yan reapplied them by attacking again, causing the three Scaled Frogs to continue losing health every second.

After a while, the Scaled Frogs couldn't endure the torment any longer. Succumbing to the continuous damage, they dropped dead on the ground.

Yao Yao, Yu Lan, and Bai Kaishui rushed over to Nie Yan's location. As they reached the clearing, they all stopped dead in their tracks. They arrived just in time to witness the Scaled Frogs collapsing to the ground. Unexpectedly, all three died from being bled out by continuous damage! It was already considered incredible for a Warrior to come out on top after taking on five equal-levelled monsters at the same time. However, a Thief pulling this off? That was basically impossible... unless they possessed some really top-notch equipment.

Yet not only was Nie Yan somehow alive after such a battle, he was still at full health! Did he really only rely on simple sidesteps to evade the attacks of five Scaled Frogs?

Yu Lan and the other two could hardly contain their shock. Although Nie Yan was widely renowned as the Mad Rogue, until now they had never personally witnessed him accomplish something so outrageous with their own eyes. The feeling they got was completely different from watching a video.

Employing the techniques of a Shadow Dancer to deal with Level 30 monsters was practically akin to having an adult fight a six-year-old child. There was no challenge at all.

After killing the five Scaled Frogs, Nie Yan bent down to pick up the drops. He saw Yao Yao and the others walking over to him. “What’s the matter? Did something happen?”

“Sun said he accidentally bumped into a Lord-class Scaled Frog while scouting for Elites and Sub-Elites. It chased him for a long time, and he nearly died to it. He barely managed to escape just a moment ago.” Yao Yao was also amazed by what Nie Yan had done, but she was already more or less accustomed to these kinds of occurrences. He was precisely the type of person who achieved the impossible.

Nie Yan’s mind trembled. After so long, they finally found another Lord-class Scaled Frog. He wondered just what kind of good items would drop this time around.

“Where’s the Lord-class Scaled Frog now?”

“238.282.287, Sun is watching over it. He’s telling us to get over there quickly.” Yao Yao paused before asking in an anxious tone, “Do you think we can kill a Lord-class Scaled Frog?”

“Tang Yao and I have killed one before. Let’s go over and take a look,” Nie Yan replied.

They rushed over to Sun’s location.

As for exactly how Nie Yan killed a group of five Scaled Frogs without taking any damage, no one asked. It was a mystery best kept unprofaned, like never asking a Magician to reveal his secrets.

Before long, Nie Yan and the others met up with Sun who was in a very sorry state. With only a sliver of health remaining, he was recovering by eating a bread loaf under the shade of a tree.

Noticing Nie Yan’s arrival, Sun hastily stood up to greet him. “Big Brother, you guys came!”

Nie Yan patted Sun on the shoulder. “You did well. In all of Calore, I can count on one hand the number of players around your level that can survive such an encounter with a Lord-class Scaled Frog.”

“Where is it?” Bai Kaishui asked after looking around.

“Over there.” Sun pointed at a place in the distance.

There, Bai Kaishui and the others spotted an enormous, crimson Scaled Frog towering above the dense forest, even while crouched. Although it looked slightly different from the Lord-class Scaled Frog that he faced before, Nie Yan could confirm that the monster before them was still just a regular Lord. It was only natural to be wary, though. The skills of Variant Lords did differ from their ordinary counterparts to some extent.

“Can we use the Smoke Powder to deal with that Scaled Frog?” Sun asked. He believed they could take down the Lord-class Scaled Frog in a similar fashion to the Sub-Elites and Elites.

Nie Yan shook his head. “The vision range of a Lord-class Scaled Frog is greater than Elite or Sub-Elite.” If they adopted the same strategy he and Tang Yao used before, it would be just as effective. However, he had a different plan in mind. He wanted to kill the Lord-class Scaled Frog by employing the techniques of a Shadow Dancer! It was much slower than him, so he definitely felt this was feasible. So long as he took care to avoid its skills, he would be all right.

“What should we do then? Do we call Big Brother Bladelight over?” Sun asked. In the entire group, only Bladelight was capable of enduring the attacks of the Lord-class Scaled Frog. They were all in the same general vicinity anyway. If everyone fought together, they could definitely kill it.

“No need. Let me give it a shot,” Nie Yan said. After comprehending the mysteries behind a Shadow Dancer, he had the utmost confidence in being able to dispatch this Lord-class Scaled Frog.

“Just you alone?” Sun, Yao Yao, Yu Lan, and Bai Kaishui stared at him in shock.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine by myself.” Nie Yan turned to Sun and said, “Watch my actions closely. It’ll definitely be helpful to you.”

If Nie Yan demonstrated the techniques of a Shadow Dancer in this battle, Sun’s naturally high aptitude for playing the Thief class might allow him to comprehend them to some extent.

## Chapter 210 – Slaughter Fiend Medallion (Thief)

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Nie Yan was absolutely confident in his ability to kill Scaled Frogs. Especially since leveling up, his speed had increased a lot, and he could disregard even a Lord-class Scaled Frog. Now that there was only a one-level gap between them, he would no longer need to rely on anything but the blade in his hand.

Under the cover of stealth, Nie Yan crept up to the Lord-class Scaled Frog until he was only ten meters away. The monster still hadn't noticed Nie Yan, who then scanned it with Transcendent Insight.

Scaled Frog (Lord): Level 30

Health: 50,000/50,000

Nie Yan estimated that it would only take him twenty minutes to whittle down this Scaled Frog's health. Back when Tang Yao had first taken down one of these, it had taken him a full ten hours. Although his lower level and damage output at the time was part of this disparity, no Mage's cast speed could compare to the rapid-fire offense of a Thief. Additionally, Nie Yan could now induce high amounts of continuous damage using [Splitting Edge](#) to cause bleed and the [Scarlet Poison Ring](#) to inflict poison. With these items, just a casual attack could cause an enemy to lose 50 hitpoints per second, which would increase to over 70 or even 80 health per second when stacked with a bleed skill like Eviscerate. Just the continuous damage alone would take a huge chunk of the boss's

health. Unlike attack damage, continuous damage ignored defense. This made it especially effective on high-level monsters with tough defenses.

“You be careful then,” Yao Yao fretted. She was worried about Nie Yan’s safety.

“Don’t worry.” With a faint curve of his mouth, Nie Yan snuck up behind the Lord-class Scaled Frog. The monster had just felt something and was about to turn around to investigate when Nie Yan suddenly rushed at him with a burst of speed and struck out with a Concussive Blow.

The Scaled Frog froze in place, having been stunned for a couple of seconds.

Nie Yan’s dagger stabbed into the monster’s back with an Eviscerate, cutting it open and causing blood to spurt out.

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-32  
-12  
-20  
-32  
...

A continuous stream of damage values floated up from the Scaled Frog’s head. First came the damage from his attack, followed by



bleed from Splitting Edge, then poison damage, and finally Eviscerate's bleed damage. This frighteningly high damage output even put a Mage wearing a high-damage set to shame. Continuous damage was extremely terrifying, especially against monsters like the Scaled Frog with strong defenses.

With Nie Yan's current damage output, he could rightfully look down upon anything equal to his level. Even fighting creatures above his level wouldn't pose much of a challenge.

The Lord-class Scaled Frog turned its head, and looking almost like a massive tank, charged toward Nie Yan. Accurately predicting where its attack would land, Nie Yan's figure flashed as he circled behind the giant frog once more. The dagger in his hand easily pierced the frog's hard scales as he quickly used Backstab.

Nie Yan's dagger stabbed into the Scaled Frog's back repeatedly despite its attempt to turn around and face its foe. Damage values continued to stream into the air above its head.

Nie Yan's movements were as moving clouds and flowing water. He was so fast that each time his adversary tried to attack him, he could immediately predict the trajectory of its attack from its starting movements and dodge with minimal effort to avoid the attack.

These flexible maneuvers weren't any worse than what a true Shadow Dancer could do.

This was what shadow dancing was all about. This level of skill

allowed a thief to look down upon all magic users. Even Fighters without impact skills that did area-of-effect knockbacks would only die when facing a Shadow Dancer.

Whereever his dagger released a dazzling light, blood gushed out into the air like flowers blooming

The Lord-class Scaled Frog's health quickly fell, chunk by chunk. Nie Yan's damaging capabilities were simply too fierce. Even though the boss was recovering 20 hit points per second, that measly healing ability was no use in the face of massive bleed and poison damage.

As Sun watched Nie Yan's actions closely, his eyes took on a wolfish glint. This level of skill was exactly what he needed to achieve! Such accurate judgement! Such perfect dodges! His mind had a flash of inspiration as he saw what a true Thief was supposed to be!

The master opened the door, but the step was his to take. Nie Yan had already shown Sun what shadow dancing looked like. It was now up to him to comprehend it for himself.

Nie Yan's damage output alone was plenty to kill this Lord-class Scaled Frog. There was no need for the others to intervene.

However, Yao Yao still waved her staff and cast Holy Smite. The spell struck the Scaled Frog's body, dealing 15 points of damage to its health. Although this bit of peanut damage wasn't much, any bit helped. With Nie Yan doing so much damage, she had no fear of

accidentally shifting aggro onto herself.

Yu Lan, Sun, and Bai Kaishui also took out their weapons and began attacking the boss. Even though they could only do 1 or 2 damage per hit, it was still better than doing nothing.

Ten minutes later, the Lord-class Scaled Frog was still furiously struggling to land its first hit on Nie Yan. It was now that the frog opened its mouth and spat out a scarlet cloud of toxins, which quickly billowed through the air.

When Nie Yan saw this poisonous cloud, he quickly retreated. Because of his excellent timing, the toxin didn't affect him in the slightest.

Despite the Lord-class Scaled Frog being obscured by the toxic red fog, continuous damage values could still be seen floating up nonstop from its head. Its recovery speed increased somewhat in the toxic fog, but it still couldn't keep up with the incredible continuous damage inflicted by Nie Yan.

Backing up ten meters, Nie Yan put his dagger away. He took his Crossbow of Blood out and began to shoot a flurry of bolts. With a succession of sounds, three bolts found their mark. However, their damage was minimal. Each bolt only did 5 or 6 damage to the monster, which now had only 23% of its health left. This had gone even faster than Nie Yan had expected.

The cloud of poison quickly spread to cover a fifty-foot radius around the boss, albeit somewhat diluted. During the time, the

continuous damage effects wore off and the boss's natural regeneration began to slowly restore its health. If this was allowed to continue, their efforts for the last ten minutes would go to waste.

With a bottle of Junior Antidote in his hand, he stepped forward to test the venomous cloud. Five points per second. It seems that it has truly diluted after spreading this far. However, even though the effect was greatly weakened, 5 points per second was still alarming. At that rate, Nie Yan would lose 300 points in a minute and die in two if he let it freely tick away at his health. Seeing this, he chugged the bottle in his hand. Because it had a cooldown of five minutes but only lasted for thirty seconds, the Junior Antidote was not particularly effective against sustained poisons like this one.

It was fortunate they hadn't called over Resplendent Bladelight and the others. Otherwise, they would have had trouble dealing with this powerful poison released by the Lord-class Scaled Frog. After all, Resplendent Bladelight wasn't high enough level yet. It wouldn't be until he was around Level 30 that he could safely tank this boss.

Nie Yan did a roll to evade the attack of the Lord-class Scaled Frog, then darted through the poisonous fog to continue his assault.

The Lord-class Scaled Frog rushed fiercely at Nie Yan whose body flashed to the side. His movements were like the wind as he once more arrived behind the frog and attacked it with a Backstab followed by Eviscerate.

The giant frog leaped but missed yet again. It's bulky body just couldn't keep up with Nie Yan's agility.

Nie Yan instantly unleashed his strongest attacks, bursting the Lord-class Scaled Frog down to five percent in two minutes. The boss became enraged, increasing its speed greatly. Now the monster's speed was higher than Nie Yan's, he could definitely feel the difficulty spike. He couldn't just casually run circles around the boss anymore.

The Lord-class Scaled Frog tried to ram sideways into Nie Yan, who could only hastily dodge. He retreated backward at full speed with Swift Retreat.

The Scaled Frog angrily chased after Nie Yan. Although his flight through the woods seemed dangerous, he was always careful over the distance between them. Even at its closest, the frog never had a chance to land a hit on Nie Yan.

Yao Yao and the others didn't slack behind, stepping up their attacks. Although their damage didn't increase, the previously insignificant attacks now began to take chunks out of its remaining health. After all, the boss only had less than five percent of its health left.

Nie Yan's continuous damage effects also continued to chip away at the monster's health.

It was almost dead!

The Lord-class Scaled Frog suddenly leapt high into the air and descended toward Nie Yan. Just as it was about to crush him, Nie Yan used Shadow Dance and disappeared.

With a massive thud, the gigantic frog slammed heavily into the ground. Everyone held their breaths, until Nie Yan reappeared behind it with a blur, striking out with Assassinate. Immediately, he added yet another Eviscerate to its back and watched the monster's health fall from 4% to 3%.

By the time the Lord-class Scaled Frog turned around to attack Nie Yan, he had already retreated over five meters away. His plan was exactly to chip away at the boss' health with continuous damage until it died!

With only 1% health remaining, the creature still furiously stormed after Nie Yan. Yao Yao's spells and the others' arrows continued to land on the massive frog.

The Lord-class Scaled Frog chased after Nie Yan, catching up bit by bit until he was almost able to attack him.

-12

Finally, its final sliver of health was drained away. Its plump body, having lost support, hit the ground with an immense thud.

"It's dead," Sun said.

During the entire fight, the others hadn't done much at all. The fight was basically carried entirely by Nie Yan. A Level 29 player soloing a Level 30 Lord was truly hard to believe, but Nie Yan had done it right in front of them.

Nie Yan looked at his experience bar. It had risen by 12%. While this was still a significant sum, the gains were clearly incomparable to the ridiculous levelling speed brought about by killing monsters many levels above him.

「Look at what it dropped.」Bai Kaishui curiously sent over through team chat.

What would a Lord-class monster drop?

Nie Yan bent down to pick the items up. There were two gems, a skill book, and a blood-red medallion. The metal medallion was unadorned, with only a Fiend Totem engraved on it. It looked extremely eerie and exuded a bloody stench.

Nie Yan's heart leapt. He got a Slaughter Fiend Medallion?!

In the previous timeline, he had seen pictures of the medallion as well as its properties, so he had a vague recollection of it. Once he picked it up, a crisp system tone rung out. He opened the message.

Are you sure you would like to bind the Slaughter Fiend

## Medallion?

There were two options below it. He could either hit confirm or destroy. Only he could use this particular Slaughter Fiend Medallion. Nie Yan naturally picked confirm without any hesitation.



# Chapter 211 – Invincible

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After so long, I’ve finally gotten my hands on a Slaughter Fiend Medallion! Nie Yan couldn’t help but feel a little excited. The two supplementary skills for the Thief version of the medallion were both really good.

## Slaughter Fiend Medallion (Thief)

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Rank: Junior (Owner must kill 1,000 players at least 2 levels above them to upgrade to Intermediate.)

Description: Can be upgraded through slaughter. However, the owner will grow more vulnerable with each subsequent upgrade.

Properties: Attack +20%, Defense -20%, Dexterity +20, Ignore Level +3, Armour Pierce

Junior Berserk Transformation: Enter a berserk state when health drops below 50%. Increases Attack and Movement Speed by 30%. Gain 10 Attack for every enemy slain.

Cooldown: 30 seconds

Junior Mind Immune: Defends against all Mind Magic for 3 seconds.

Cooldown: 30 seconds

Restrictions: Can only be used by the original owner. Bound after being picked up. Cannot be traded or dropped. Can be destroyed.

The Thief version of the medallion was a bit different from the Mage version. Its properties weren't bad, but it was the two supplementary skills that really made the item so great. Berserk Transformation would give a substantial boost to the player's offensive power when their health fell below 50%. However, the most important was Mind Immune. Any Thief who frequently engaged in PvP was very clear on what type of skills posed the greatest threat to them—crowd control skills! In the previous timeline, the official website once did a study of what Thieves died the most to during PvP: 52% Warrior's Tendon Break, 35% Mage's Control Magic, 9% high burst damage...

The Tendon Break skill of a Warrior ranked at number one. Warriors restrained Thieves, this was without a doubt. Whenever a Thief suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of a Mage, it was almost always because of Control Magic which posed a far greater threat to them than frightening burst damage.

Whether in large-scale wars or group battles, Priests were a favourite target of Thieves. As a cloth-armour support class, they were the most vulnerable. Not to mention they possessed annoying skills like Glimmer Mark and Illuminate. It was no surprise the vast majority of Thieves chose to take them out right off the bat.

The type of Control Magic that Priests were most proficient with was Mind Magic. So having something like Mind Immune would give an immense advantage when dealing with them.

Another reason Nie Yan wanted the Slaughter Fiend Medallion was that between Black Heaven and Black Hell, one was a Holy Priest and the other was most likely a Shadow Priest. He couldn't discount the possibility of them having Mind Control Magic. With Mind Immune from the Slaughter Fiend Medallion and Holy Descent from the [Medal of the Ten Holy Paladins](#), he didn't believe the two of them could pose any sort of threat to him.

Nie Yan had already made preparations for his encounter with Black Heaven and Black Hell. Since Black Heaven was one of the Seven Archbishops in the previous timeline, he still hadn't abandoned his goal of recruiting them into Asskickers United. Although they were currently members of Dark Hero, it was in a state of decline, so that would probably change soon. However, if he mobilized a force to snatch the Chapter of Harmony away from them, it was the same as gifting an Archbishop to another guild. He assigned some subordinates to track Black Heaven and Black Hell down, but those two were exceedingly cautious, changing location every hour or so. His subordinates had no way of finding them at all.

Since Black Heaven and Black Hell couldn't be found, Nie Yan could only wait for them to come knocking at his doorstep. He had already prepared a response for them, and the Slaughter Fiend Medallion emerged at an exceedingly opportune time.

The two gems that dropped were both Fortune Gems. Nie Yan examined the skill book—Poison Mist Cloud. It was an area-of-effect spell for Arcane Mages. All creatures caught within the spell would take 10 damage every second. With a range of 3,030 meters, its effects were very potent.

This skill book would definitely be given to a guild member who signed a contract.

“Aside from the Thief version of the Slaughter Fiend Medallion, a skill book dropped,” Nie Yan announced before sharing the properties of the medallion for everyone to see.

Sun’s eyes sparkled. “If I kill over a hundred players, will I be able to get a Slaughter Fiend Medallion too?”

“You’ll have to spend a long time getting your kill count up to 100, then coming back here to farm a Slaughter Fiend Medallion. Even then, it’s not a guaranteed drop, and if you don’t get it, you’ll have to start all over again. Can you imagine how much time you’d be wasting? You’re better off levelling up some more and collecting better equipment during that time.” Nie Yan poured cold water on any ideas Sun might have gotten in his head.

“Oh, I guess that’s true. Forget it...” Sun said in disappointment.

“The guild has many sets of Level 30 Gold equipment for Thieves. You’ll get to wear them when you hit Level 30, so you should hurry and level up!” Nie Yan said. Although Sun was a bit childish, his talents were absolutely unmatched. Even so, he still needed careful guidance.

When Sun watched how Nie Yan killed the Lord-class Scaled Frog by himself, he had a profound realization. Deep in his heart, Nie Yan became even more of a goal he secretly strived toward. He

wanted to be a godly Thief just like Nie Yan!

“Alright, everyone, let’s get in a bit of extra levelling before the servers shut down for the day,” Nie Yan said. They still had about half-an-hour of game time remaining.

Nie Yan and the others returned to hunting the Scaled Frogs.

...

Calore Transfer Area, two figures stepped out of the transfer point.

Both of them wore black cloaks to conceal their appearances. They were precisely the owners of the Chapter of Harmony, Black Heaven and Black Hell.

Black Hell checked the system notification and said, “Nirvana Flame’s last location just updated. He’s south of Calore, probably clearing his red name. I don’t think he’ll be moving too far for now.”

“Big Brother, do you think we can beat that guy?” Black Heaven said with a hint of nervousness. He recalled the video of Nie Yan killing Hei Zhuo. It had really left a deep impression on him. He previously had absolute confidence in Black Hell. Out of everyone he had met so far, none of them were stronger than his big brother. However, after watching the video, his heart started to waver ever so slightly. Mad Rogue, Nirvana Flame... he really did

seem awesome. Now, if people heard someone was preparing to find Nirvana Flame to look for trouble, they would definitely think that person was overestimating themselves.

If you asked what type of person Black Hell was, not many people could give you an answer. However, if you brought up the name [Invincible](#), then plenty of people would know. Invincible was very famous in the popular virtual reality games of the past. When Dark Hero was considered one of the best guilds, it was under his leadership. He once ranked number one on the professional player leaderboards for three years in a row. Later on, however, the Dark Hero gaming organization disbanded and Invincible disappeared. From then on, the guild went on a steady decline. The top experts of Dark Hero left one after the other, scattering to other guilds. With so many people gone, only a few long-time members chose to remain. None of them knew that Invincible, the former leader who had brought them to glory, was actually Black Hell. Unfortunately, he was already an entirely different person from the Invincible of long ago. What's more, he had chosen to renounce the Warrior class to play a Shadow Priest.

I've decided to translate the name Walking Alone Under the Heavens (獨步天下) to just Invincible for short.

However, no one forgot the heyday of Dark Hero. Quite a few experts among the major guilds were former members of Dark Hero. Many of them would still frequently reminisce about their former glory, only to start endlessly sighing. Whenever they chatted with someone new, a certain question would still occasionally be asked. "I used to be part of Dark Hero. Do you know what ever happened to our guild leader, Invincible?" However, no one knew the answer, causing them to feel deep regret.

Black Hell's eyes glowed with determination. "I want to test out just how strong that guy is." The current him no longer pursued money and fame. All he wanted to do was use his own unique method of playing to enjoy the game. From his perspective, Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame was an interesting opponent, nothing more.

Black Heaven knew Black Hell's competitive spirit was reignited. His big brother's nature was always like so.

Although Invincible had changed his name, in some respect, he was still walking alone under the heavens. One can only imagine just how brash, just how amazing he considered himself, when he first picked the name.

Black Hell knew just what kind of opponent he was going to face. He wasn't suicidal. His goal was to defeat Nie Yan, then seize all the chapters from the Book of Order in his possession.

"Let's go to the Starry Night Potion Shop to buy some potions," Black Hell said. Before he faced off against Nirvana Flame, he had to make ample preparations, and good potions were absolutely necessary. As for buying potions from other places, he could think of a few other shops, but none of them surpassed the Starry Night Potion Shop.

"When are we going to find him?" Black Heaven asked. Since his big brother had made his decision, he wouldn't say any more superfluous words.

Black Hell thought for a moment before replying, “Early tomorrow morning, we’ll go find that guy together.”

Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame, let’s see if your skills really match the name...

The two chatted as they walked into the Starry Night Potion Shop together.

After Nie Yan and the others levelled for a while, they checked the server clock. It was almost time to log off.

“Nirvana Flame, I’m logging off now.” Yao Yao bid farewell to Nie Yan, waving her hands.

“Let’s meet tomorrow.”

“Boss, we’re leaving.”

“Big Brother, I’m getting off.”

...

Listening to these simple, ordinary farewells, Nie Yan couldn’t help but give rise to a melancholic sigh. He recalled how he spent almost all of his time alone in his past life. His daily routine had consisted of hunting monsters for most of the day, returning to the city just before the servers shut down to put all the unneeded drops



in the auction house or maybe convert some of his ingame gold to credits, then silently logging off. Only very occasionally would a few people go out of their way to say goodbye to him, like Yao Yao, Tang Yao, or strangers he levelled with on that day.

This life was far different from his past one. Nevertheless, he rather liked the feeling of his present circumstances.

Nie Yan logged out of the game. He could hear a few relatives, who were on fairly good terms with his parents, helping pack stuff downstairs. From what he could gather from the conversation downstairs, since they were about to move away to the capital, his parents had invited these relatives for dinner at a restaurant tonight. Afterward, the Nie family would be living in their new villa by tomorrow.

“Little Yan, we’re going to move to the capital. Go say goodbye to your classmates,” Mother Nie stroked Nie Yan’s head and said in an affectionate tone.

Nie Yan didn’t have many friends in his hometown highschool. Although he got along fine with many people, he wasn’t particularly close to anyone. “They’re probably busy with their own things. I’ll give them a phone call to let them know.”

“That’s fine too.” Mother Nie nodded.

I’m finally moving to the capital. Nie Yan was looking forward to his reunion with Xie Yao.

## Chapter 212 – Amassing Funds

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Nie Yan called up several classmates, informing them that he was transferring to another school in Huahai City. All of them were quite surprised. From what they recalled, Nie Yan's family wasn't particularly well off. Could his family's finances even support a move to the big capital, let alone transferring him to a school in the city? Nie Yan didn't bother explaining. In any case, they were only nodding acquaintances. It was fine to just let them know he was moving and say goodbye.

Nie Yan spent most of the day visiting a couple of relatives with his parents. Afterwards, the whole family moved everything to their residence in the suburbs of Huahai City. They still had a lot of unpacking to do.

Nie Yan's new home was a luxurious villa beside a crystal-clear lake near the mountains. It had an enormous courtyard filled with all sorts of plant life with numerous flowers in full bloom. The scenery was beautiful. The villa in his memories, however, wasn't this one but rather a different place a few hundred meters away from here.

The situation in this life somewhat differed from his past one, so there were bound to be minute changes.

His rebirth produced a tiny butterfly effect which gradually proliferated outward, altering the world in a distinct but subtle way. He suddenly had a strange thought. Was it possible for his tampering with events to even influence the upcoming election?

Maybe so... No one could predict the future.

Even as a reincarnator, he could only drift along the currents of time. The future was forever out of his control, just like the unpredictability of the stock market. All Nie Yan could do was slowly raise his personal strength, to let himself wield some power to ruthlessly strike at the rails of destiny in the face of an uncertain future, altering the direction of history. At the very least, he couldn't allow the events of his past life to recur. That much would be enough.

Nie Yan enjoyed the warm happiness of being together with his parents.

To him, having a dull, ordinary life like this again was a gift from Heaven.

Nie Yan gave Guo Huai a phone call.

「Your family moved to Huahai? Where?」

「27 [Ping'an](#) District,」Nie Yan replied. In his past life, he had once ridiculed the name of this district for being so lame and boring. Only later on would he come to realize just how precious the words safe and peaceful were to him.

The two words mean safe and peaceful.

「That's a neighbourhood with all villas, right? Even the cheapest place in that area is at least ¥50,000,000! Wow! Not bad, brat!

You're a rich and loaded prodigal son now! By the way, my old man assessed various places in Conviction. The valuation of a single plot of land in Calore is ridiculously expensive! You know those properties you had me buy on your behalf in the other cities? Their value can't even be estimated!」Guo Huai said. Nie Yan's current net worth was high enough to leave people speechless. As for exactly how many properties Nie Yan owned, even Guo Huai was unclear.

「When stronghold sieges start in the future, if we can occupy a stronghold and create our own city, you'll find out what it really means to be rich in the game!」Nie Yan laughed.

「I'll wait for that time to come, then. I heard in-game currency conversion will be released in five or six days. Reportedly, an auction of virtual properties is going to begin soon. A portion of them will be auctioned off on the transaction platform. The time still hasn't been announced yet,」Guo Huai informed. Many powers would definitely be looking to invest into Conviction in the future. Even his old man was starting to get a little restless.

Only now did Nie Yan recall such a matter. His heart turned cold. Financial bigwigs like Cao Xu were finally about to enter the playing field.

The auction houses, NPC potion shops, and so on of every major city would be auctioned off. Many financial institutes would definitely convince players to sell all their in-game currency for real world money, then divide up the virtual assets among themselves.

When Nie Yan's father entered Conviction during the peak of its craze, he sadly discovered that he had already missed the best time to join. Sometimes, opportunities were fleeting. Once missed, they would never appear again.

What Nie Yan wanted to do was purchase as many virtual properties as he could. During the next few weeks or so, he would no longer dare to be so extravagant as to spend 500 gold on Magic Bombs. The 1,000 Magic Bombs he had now were enough to power level Undying Scoundrel, Sun, and the others to Level 30.

「Make an announcement to the guild members that we'll be exchanging in-game currency with guild contribution for the next few days. 1 silver for 25 merit points will be the rate. This will tentatively last for three days. In addition, for every silver contributed to the guild, the player will receive an additional 20 merit point discount when exchanging Level 30 equipment. If a player contributes 10 silver in one go, when they reach Level 30, they can redeem one piece of Level 30 Silver-grade equipment—30 silver and it'll be Gold-grade,」Nie Yan said after thinking for a moment. He wanted to rely on this method to quickly amass in-game currency.

「1 silver for 25 merit points? Aren't we taking too big of a loss?」Guo Huai asked in shock. In Asskickers United, 1 silver was roughly equivalent to 20 merit points. If they went with Nie Yan's conversion rate, wouldn't the guild's treasury be swept clean in no time?

「It's fine if we take a bit of a loss in the short term. Besides, during this time, the value of in-game currency will definitely

increase. We're gathering gold now in preparation for the upcoming virtual property auction. After it's over, we can replenish the guild treasury,」Nie Yan said. This was a tactic to get all the guild members to give their money to the guild. After the virtual property auction was over, the future profits from the properties Nie Yan acquired would be used to help give back to the guild members.

「Those contribution incentives are pretty good,」Guo Huai said. He was a natural businessman. With a simple glance, he could tell how good those incentives were. For the sake of having good equipment to wear when they reach Level 30, the guild members would definitely do their best to raise money to give to the guild. The guild wouldn't have to expend too much effort to obtain a great amount of gold. When the virtual property auction ended and the real world currency exchange opened, the profits they'd earn would definitely be at least a thousandfold. When the guild members reached Level 30, the guild would naturally be able to provide them with Silver and Gold equipment.

「I'll leave you to handle this matter. Let's see how much gold we can gather in the next few days,」Nie Yan said. The property he was eying the most was the auction house at the heart of Calore. Even though other auction houses had been established in all parts of Calore, fragmenting player attention, it was still a landmark structure. It was the most prosperous auction house in the entire Viridian Empire! If he wanted to purchase it, he would need to bring out at least 2,000 gold. In the previous timeline, it was sold for a final bid of close to 3,000 gold.

If Nie Yan could buy the auction house at the center of Calore, it would have an extremely far-reaching impact on the future of

Asskickers United.

The various financial institutes were also amassing funds. Their network of contacts went far deeper than Nie Yan's. While the bigwigs were fighting with each other, if he could cut out a piece of juicy meat for himself, it would already be considered a success.

「Don't worry. I'll definitely help you manage this matter well,」 Guo Huai said, full of confidence.

「There's one other thing I want you to help me with. How deep are your contacts in Huahai? Can you help me look into a certain person?」Nie Yan hesitated for a moment before asking.

「Who?」Guo Huai asked in surprise.

「A girl called Xie Yao. She's a second year in Class 3 at University of Huahai's Affiliated High School,」Nie Yan said. He decided that it was still best for him to find out about Xie Yao's background first. Know thy self, know thy enemy, or a crush in this case... In the previous timeline, he didn't know anything about Xie Yao's family circumstances. All he knew was that her family was well-off. In this life, he was finally enlightened. He knew where to start.

「Oh? A blockhead like you has finally fallen in love, huh? So this is going to be my future sister-in-law, I see. Don't worry, I'll immediately help you investigate. Even if I have to go down a meter deep, I'll still help you dig the information up.」Guo Huai chuckled. It was quite rare for Nie Yan to have his eyes set on a girl. How could he not help out?

「Don't trouble her.」

「Of course, I know that,」Guo Huai said.

「What about you, huh? How goes your progress with our former class pres?」Nie Yan teased.

Guo Huai dryly coughed to cover up his embarrassment.「It's still more or less the same. I only took her out on a date once.」

Nie Yan laughed.「You dared to ask her out. That's already good progress!」

「Haha...」Guo Huai awkwardly laughed.

The two chatted for a while longer before hanging up.

Nie Yan's father had already left to manage the company, while Nie Yan accompanied his mother as they walked around Huahai. Around evening, his relatives from Ninjiang would come over to have dinner. The travel time between the two places wasn't that long anyway, only around thirty minutes. Everything had already been unpacked in the villa. They had finished one day earlier than expected.

Nie Yan's room was located at the southern part of the villa. If he opened up the curtains, he could see a beautiful landscape outside.



His father had already had some people deal with the formalities of transferring to a new school. He would start classes in two days.

The gorgeous red clouds on the horizon caused by the setting sun were quite dazzling.

A cool breeze blew in from outside the window, clearing Nie Yan's head.

Nie Yan took a deep breath of air. His mood had gotten a lot better lately for some indescribable reason. He was about to relive his final year of high school. It was something he was really looking forward to.

In the previous timeline, he was basically a nobody in his class. At least half of his own classmates weren't even able to recognize him. In this life, he wanted to genuinely fit in with everyone.

「Damn! You've moved to Huahai? Which school?」Tang Yao asked in excitement.

「University of Hauhai's Affiliated High School,」Nie Yan replied. Tang Yao went to school at Huahai High School 1. The two schools were quite far from each other.

「University of Hauhai's Affiliated High School?」Tang Yao paused for a moment to think.「Let me ask my old man, and see if I can transfer over.」

Nie Yan recalled his past life. Tang Yao had also said similar words back then, but later on, nothing came out of it.

「We're both only a year from graduating. Forget it, save yourself the trouble,」Nie Yan said with a light laugh.

「Do you still remember that brat, Wei Kai?」Tang Yao suddenly asked.

「Yeah, why? What about him?」Nie Yan asked. Wei Kai was a person who walked the path of a criminal. The less contact made with such a person, the better.

「He just took over a guild called Shattered Gale. It's a decent sized guild with around 5,000 to 6,000 members. That guy knows I'm Young Sparrow Hawk and you're Nirvana Flame, and that we both established Asskickers United. He says he wants to rely on us for help!」Tao Yao said in high spirits. He recalled just how insufferably arrogant Wei Kai had been in the past. Now, he was like a subservient dog as he approached them for help.

Shattered Gale... Nie Yan had heard of such a guild in his past life but didn't really have an impression of it. 5,000 to 6,000 members could be considered not bad. Wei Kai had actually sleazed his way to a bit of success with 2,000 subordinates who were willing to throw their lives away for him. However, from what happened to him in the previous timeline, evidently that still wasn't enough. Before he could bask in the limelight for long, he ended up disappearing to who knows where, while his fate was unknown.

Nie Yan weighed the matter over. A person like Wei Kai was a double-edged sword. If he took Wei Kai in, there was a chance he might bring some unsavoury trouble with him. However, at an essential moment, having the power of someone from the criminal underworld would still prove useful, just like the relationship Cao Xu had with Heaven Breaker. Heaven Breaker was a somewhat infamous criminal, after all.

「Let me carefully think this matter over. Don't give him a definite answer for now,」Nie Yan said. This sort of thing had to be carefully deliberated before making a decision.

## Chapter 213 – Honour

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Nie Yan decided it was best to first have Guo Huai thoroughly investigate Wei Kai and understand his circumstances before making a decision. Wei Kai was like a ferocious tiger cub. When carefully groomed, he would prove to be a highly useful helper. However, if they weren't careful, he might come back to bite them in the ass. Nie Yan had to hold enough over Wei Kai to ensure absolute loyalty. He left Guo Huai in charge of this matter.

Looking at the time, he saw that it was almost time to log in. He put on his game helmet, then entered the game.

Yao Yao, Sun, and the others were already online.

“Mornin’, Nirvana Flame.”

“Good morning, Big Brother!”

“Boss Nirvana Flame, Morning.”

After greeting them, Nie Yan suggested, “Let’s continue farming Elites.” With the new day, all the Elites and Sub Elites in the area had respawned. For this group of people, killing Elite Scaled Frogs was an easy task. Taking care of all of them only took half an hour, after which the group split up to go farm ordinary Scaled Frogs on their own.

After killing a Scaled Frog, Nie Yan’s head suddenly snapped up

to look around the forest. He had felt something looking at him for a while now, and the feeling had gotten stronger after the group split up. However, despite scanning the forest multiple times, he hadn't seen anything of note.

He understood that he was being targeted. He had both a good sense for danger and a high Awareness stat, which allowed him to vaguely feel the other party watching him.

Since he hadn't seen anything, the other person was probably in stealth. It might be a Thief!

Nie Yan's left hand subconsciously touched the hilt of his dagger as he delved deeper into the woods, further and further from the rest of his team.

Nie Yan guessed that whoever it was probably was afraid to appear if his teammates were nearby. Therefore, he left the group to try and lure the snake out of its hole.

Looking down at his skills, he made sure they were all off cooldown.

As he made his way through the forest, he eventually wandered a few thousand meters from the rest of his team.

Save for some croaking, the forest was silent. The morning mist drifted slowly, adding a graceful feeling to the tranquil woods. A cold morning breeze blew gently, gradually clearing the fog.

Seeing a Scaled Frog in front of him, Nie Yan snuck up behind it and attacked, but refrained from using his skills. He absentmindedly fought the frog as his focus remained on the tree line, scouring for movement.

Their stealth is rather high. Even with my high Awareness, I still haven't been able to locate them.

After a while, the Scaled Frog fell to Nie Yan's ordinary attacks and weapon bleed damage, collapsing onto the ground.

Still not going to act?

Nie Yan headed toward another Scaled Frog. The stalker still refused to attack, despite Nie Yan leaving some false openings on purpose. They just kept following behind him, unshakeable but also not doing anything.

Their patience is amazing. They're probably going to be a strong opponent.

As Nie Yan searched for more Scaled Frogs, he suddenly became alert. The presence behind him was gone.

Could he have left already?

Nie Yan told his suspicions to his teammates, instructing them to

be careful and reminding the red named players not to move about on their own. Additionally, he told Guo Huai about this development and asked him to keep watch on Victorious Return's forces. They had to be prepared well in advance in case Victorious Return sent people to the Scaled Frog spawn zone.

However, according to the current average level of Victorious Return's troops, they probably wouldn't take the risk of coming to this Level 30 area.

Nie Yan also might've simply come across a random player.

Thinking that his stalker might've gone away, Nie Yan loosened up a bit. Shifting his thoughts, he once more went through the motions of trying to send Black Hell a message. He hadn't expected it to actually go through this time.

「Hello,」Nie Yan sent.

「Hello,」Black Hell sent back, secretly thinking that Nie Yan was obviously after his Chapter of Harmony.

Black Hell had a rather deep voice. Nie Yan took his age to be around thirty years old.

「I want to purchase the Chapter of Harmony from you. What do you think is a reasonable price?」Nie Yan got straight to the point. Having played the game for a while, everyone could be considered to have come to a common understanding. Instead of exchanging

pleasantries, it was better to just cut to the chase.

「I refuse to even consider selling the Chapter of Harmony unless you can beat me in battle.」Even with Nie Yan's background as the guild leader of Asskickers United, Black Hell didn't even consider the trade.

From his words, Nie Yan realized what kind of person Black Hell was. He seemed to be one of those conceited types.

Beat him in battle, is it? Nie Yan toyed with the dagger in his hand for a bit, his eyes glinting coldly.

「I don't want to sour our relationship too much. Gaining a friend is better than making an enemy.」As the guild leader, strength was a prerequisite, but he couldn't make too many enemies either. This was especially important for a fledgling guild like Asskickers United. He still had thoughts of recruiting both Black Heaven and Black Hell. After all, Black Heaven would become an Archbishop with equal fame to Leader Young Seven in the future! He had no choice but to consider things from the guild's perspective.

After a moment of silence, Black Hell proposed,「How about we make a bet?」He wasn't afraid of Nie Yan, but he just wanted to quietly play the game. Having to fend off wave after wave of Asskickers United players would make that impossible. That would completely defeat the point.

「What kind of bet?」Nie Yan asked.



「I think the winner of our duel should get the chapters. Afterwards, we wouldn't be allowed to find each other about this matter,」Black Hell suggested. He believed this to be the best solution: if they couldn't come to an agreement, just have a bet! With the system overseeing the bet and forcibly enforcing the terms, there wouldn't be any worries about the other side refusing to pay up afterwards.

Nie Yan chuckled,「Yeah, right. Don't you think that such a simple bet is unfair when there's four chapters in my hands and only one in yours? Plus, you've restricted me from using my guild while not limiting yourself in any way.」Their strengths were not equal. Nie Yan could potentially send Asskickers United players to look for Black Hell afterwards and retake the chapters, but Black Hell wouldn't be giving up anything. This bet was clearly not balanced.

「You tell me what you think is fair, then.」Black Hell wanted to hear what Nie Yan wanted out of a bet. If this matter could be settled with a gamble, all the better. If not, then he wouldn't hesitate to fight. He never feared anyone!

「Do you have a companion called Black Heaven?」Nie Yan inquired. Black Heaven and Black Hell would theoretically be together.

Black Hell's heart turned cold. In a chilly voice, he demanded,「How did you know?」He and Black Heaven had been extremely discreet, with almost no one knowing their habits. Even most of their fellow guildmates had no idea who they were. For Nie Yan to be able to investigate them was truly no easy feat.

「I naturally have my own sources.」Nie Yan was very satisfied with the effect he had created. 「How about we change up the stakes a bit. If I win, the two of you have to quit Dark Hero and join Asskickers United as well as hand over the Chapter of Harmony. In return, if you win, I will give you all four of the chapters I hold. Additionally, I won't use my guild to get them back, and will even help you complete Volume I in the future. This should be fair for both of us.」

Although he felt that Nie Yan's offer was already pretty generous, Black Hell still refused, 「Leaving Dark Hero is unacceptable.」

「Dark Hero has long since been declining. With your skills, is staying there even worth it?」Nie Yan was puzzled as to why Black Hell was so adamant about staying in his guild.

「It's not a question of worthiness,」Black Hell answered. 「Although I refuse to leave Dark Hero, I can agree on behalf of Black Heaven to have him join your guild as part of this bet.」

Nie Yan considered the counter-offer for a bit before deciding that Black Heaven was enough. Black Hell might have some kind of trouble that prevented him from leaving Dark Hero. Plus, he had never heard of Black Hell in the previous timeline. In contrast, Black Heaven's name rang like thunder with his status as one of the Seven Archbishops. For the latter to join Asskickers United was enough.

An Archbishop! That was a character with utmost power in the game, someone who could single-handedly change the course of a battle. Nie Yan had to recruit Black Heaven no matter the cost!

If Black Hell is able to decide for Black Heaven, does that mean that, of the two, Black Hell is more powerful?

But even if Black Hell was stronger, he was still just a Shadow Priest. In terms of what he could do for the guild as a whole, a Shadow Priest couldn't hold a candle to a Holy Priest.

「I accept.」Although he would only get Black Heaven, that was enough for him. This ought to be amusing: putting an Archbishop and five chapters of the Book of Order on the line in a single PvP duel.

Nie Yan sent over a copy of the betting contract, and both parties signed the agreement. Since they had signed a system-enforced contract, both sides were at ease and didn't need to worry about the other party reneging.

「I'll go find you. I'll be there within twenty minutes,」Black Hell said as he cut off the call.

Within twenty minutes? It seems like he's already in the area. Nie Yan continued to wander the forest, killing a Scaled Frog every so often as he waited for Black Hell to arrive.

Deep in the forest, a Shadow Priest and a Holy Priest were

currently in the midst of a conversation.

“Big Brother, if you lose, will I really have to join Asskickers United?” Black Heaven asked. His heart was filled with sadness as he understood that Black Hell agreed to do this in order to not hinder his future progress.

“Remember this: no matter where you go, you must be a person who keeps his word. The current Dark Hero is no longer the guild we remember. Those who left are all wretched bastards. Every single one of them! Alas, back then, I should never have left Dark Hero to [Murky Gray](#),” Black Hell lamented.

Murky Gray’s name in Chinese is “Hui An” (灰暗 = Gray Dark) which is similar to the Dark in Dark Hero, which is “Hei An” (黑暗 = Black Dark)

Black Heaven sighed lightly. He understood how Black Hell truly felt about Dark Hero as it was right now. However, within Dark Hero there was still a certain someone. Although she was already a married woman now, Black Hell had still sworn to protect her for a lifetime.

Whether it was the promise or just his emotions was already a moot question.

“Little Brother, you deserve more room to grow, like a dragon soaring into the heavens. You shouldn’t limit yourself by just following me around,” Black Hell encouraged as he patted Black Heaven’s shoulder. However, his lonely voice just sounded bleak.

## Chapter 214 – Black Hell

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After felling two more Scaled Frogs, Nie Yan detected the peculiar presence yet again. He could clearly sense that someone was trying to approach him. However, when he turned around to look, the forest was tranquil without any signs of activity.

Just as Nie Yan walked over to another Scaled Frog, he felt the violent resonance of magic being cast behind him. In the blink of an eye, a dark power descended on him.

Enfeeble! Grief!

Curses that took effect instantaneously were especially frightening. If caught without a corresponding potion or a Priest or Paladin who could cast Dispel, you would be left in an extremely precarious situation.

Nie Yan's heart clenched in alarm. It wasn't a Thief that was after him but rather a Priest! A name immediately popped into his mind—Black Hell!

He's probably using an Invisibility Potion!

Nie Yan took a quick glance at his character information. His stats were reduced by 60%! What powerful curses! Ordinary curses that could reduce a target's stats by 20% were already quite dreadful, but these two curses had directly cut down his stats by almost two thirds!

Not giving Nie Yan the chance to activate Stealth, a bright orb of light flew up into the sky, illuminating the ground below with an unveiling radiance. Without delay a ray of light flew out from between the trees and struck him. A bright floating mark appeared above his head, exposing his position completely.

Finally, a Dark Corrosion spiralled toward Nie Yan at a matchless speed.

Dark Corrosion was one of the most formidable spells belonging to a Shadow Priest! A target struck by the spell would suffer damage over time, as well be inflicted with an extremely powerful curse.

Shit! That's a really nasty combo of spells! Nie Yan inwardly cursed. So many spells were fired off in quick succession. Black Hell wasn't letting him catch his breath at all!

Nie Yan rolled to avoid the Dark Corrosion.「Boom!」The spell whizzed by him and struck a nearby tree. Its leaves dried up and fell to the ground. Its branches withered and blackened with rot. In almost an instant, the frightening curse power corroded it into a decayed husk.

Nie Yan shot a glance at an area beside a tree about 30 meters away, where he spotted a Shadow Priest in ash-gray robes brandishing a staff and chanting out a line of incarnation syllables at a rapid pace.

The magical energy in the air fluctuated violently for a brief instant.

Before he could get back on his feet, a giant spider web dropped directly out of the sky above him!

It was Web, although clearly a higher rank. He had previously relied on the Junior version of this uncommon spell to trap many an unsuspecting target.

Swift Retreat! Nie Yan gained a sudden burst of speed. He bounded backward like lightning which put him beyond the reach of Web.

The web fell on the ground but failed to ensnare Nie Yan.

“Not just his speed, but his reaction time is pretty fast too,” Black Hell muttered, as he calmly held the staff in his hand. He had to admit... Nie Yan’s speed was really astonishing. Even after being hit with such powerful curses, he was still able to move so quickly. Black Hell recalled the awe-inspiring strike Nie Yan used to incapacitate Hei Zhuo. It was no wonder even Yu Long couldn’t stop him.

If he hadn’t made the first move, it would’ve truly been difficult to get the upper hand on Nie Yan.

Black Hell raised his staff, firing off a Shadow Arrow at Nie Yan.

Nie Yan took advantage of time for Web to end to drink a Cure Potion, removing the status effects of Enfeeble and Grief. Shadow Waltz! He took cover behind a tree to avoid the Shadow Arrow, then darted toward Black Hell.

Even though Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz, Black Hell could still determine his position thanks to Glimmer Mark. He repeatedly waved his staff, letting loose an unending torrent of spells.

However, Nie Yan's speed was too great, and Black Hell could only spot the fleeting afterimages he left behind as he darted through the gaps between the trees.

Black Hell calmly retreated until he arrived at a wide open space in the forest where no trees were growing.

The clearing covered about a 100 square meters.

He and Black Heaven had already been tailing Nie Yan for a quite a while. He could've engaged Nie Yan at any time, but he didn't want to fight on disadvantageous terrain. If he failed his ambush in a densely forested area, Nie Yan could take advantage of the cover to dispatch of him effortlessly. This was why he decided to take action just a moment ago, when he discovered there was a patch of open land nearby.

Black Hell had always been prudent. Even if success was almost guaranteed, he would still make sure to take every little advantage he could get.



Truthfully speaking, Black Hell was still much more accustomed to playing a Warrior. He still wasn't particularly comfortable playing a class like the Shadow Priest. However, if you've seen the playstyle of one caster, then you've seen the playstyle of all casters. He often PvPed against casters at the professional level in the past, so he still more or less understood how to play one proficiently.

"Let's see just how strong you are. Come!" Black Hell waved his staff, calling forth a shadow which slowly took the form of a person, devoid of any features.

Nie Yan gasped in alarm when he saw Black Heaven's actions. This guy's no joke. He already has a Shadow Familiar!

Shadow Familiars were the summoned guardians of Shadow Priests. They possessed good attack and defense.

Nie Yan left the cover of the forest and dashed into the clearing. He was going straight for Black Hell.

Waving his staff, Black Hell cast the Slow curse on Nie Yan, then quickly retreated before releasing another Shadow Arrow.

Nie Yan immediately grew sluggish. His figure paused slightly as the Shadow Arrow shot directly toward him. The timing of these two spells was practically perfect!

Nie Yan activated Holy Descent from the Medal of the Ten Holy

Paladins. The slow debuff on his body disappeared, and he reached top speed in a flash. Without the slightest hesitation, he rushed toward Black Hell.「Bang!」The Shadow Arrow exploded upon coming into contact with him, but it failed to deal the slightest bit of damage or inflict any debuffs.

At the bat of an eyelid, Nie Yan was directly in front of Black Hell. Concussive Blow! His dagger sped toward Black Hell's forehead like a streak of lightning.

Nie Yan's speed seemed even faster than in the video where he killed Hei Zhuo. Black Hell was startled. Waving his staff, his figure blurred as the Shadow Familiar moved from the side to intercept.

Nie Yan couldn't help but secretly admire his opponent. Black Hell really did have some ability. In such a short span of time, he was able to smoothly control his Shadow Familiar to block.

Shadow Familiar (Summoned Creature)

Health: 1,200/1,200

As Nie Yan struck the Shadow Familiar, it tenaciously clung to him. The 3 seconds of Holy Descent were almost up.

Nie Yan's dagger pierced into the Shadow Familiar. With a ruthless slash, he activated Lacerate.

The Shadow Familiar's health fell by over 500 points. It clawed out with both arms, striking out at Nie Yan. His body blurred into motion, evading the attack. Just as he wanted to sidestep the Shadow Familiar to get to Black Hell, he felt a dark power bind him.

It was Shadow Bind!

Shadow Bind only lasted for a second, but that brief respite gave Black Hell the opportunity to retreat several meters. A bright radiance washed over him. His robes fluttered violently, and his entire body emanated an incomparable radiance, as if a god had descended down to earth.

Black Hell brandished his staff which shone with a dazzling brilliance.

It was the Empower Status Magic from the Chapter of Harmony!

All blessings would be bolstered, while all curses would transform into something much more terrifying!

That guy is finally taking out his trump card. Nie Yan's gaze turned solemn. Would he be forced to activate Adjudicator of God? If so, it would go on cooldown for ten days.

Nie Yan was struck by the Shadow Familiar.

-106 A damage value floated up above his head.

Ignoring the Shadow Familiar, Nie Yan dashed toward Black Hell. Just as Black Hell was about to wave his staff to cast a Curse, Nie Yan threw a pouch of Intermediate Flash Powder directly at him.「Poof!」An intense, glaring radiance stabbed at Black Hell's eyes like a million tiny needles.

Inundated by the intense light, Black Hell was temporarily blind.

Nie Yan rolled to the side, evading the Enfeeble curse Black Hell had just cast.

Under normal circumstances, Black Hell's powerful curses could already reduce a target's stats by 60%. He could scarcely imagine the consequences if he were struck by them while Empower Status Magic was active.

After suffering the effects of the Intermediate Flash Powder, Black Heaven lost all ability to see. However, thanks to his excellent mental fortitude, he didn't sink into a panic. With both hands brandishing the staff back and forth, he shot out curses one after the other according to his judgement. After which he lowered his staff, then took out a bottle of Eyedrops.

Black Hell's curses were simply too frightening. If Nie Yan was hit, his stats would be reduced by at least 90%.

To top it off, even while in a state of blindness, Black Hell's

movements hardly slowed down at all. He cast curse after curse, each one more terrifying than the last. His judgement was truly exceptional. If Nie Yan was slow by even half-a-step, he would have been struck down by a hail of curses!

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz as his speed reached the apex. He evaded Black Hell's attacks, quickly circled behind him, then struck toward the back of his head with Smothering Strike.

Howl of Terror!

An ear-piercing shriek escaped from Black Hell's throat.

Just as Nie Yan's Smothering Strike was about to hit Black Hell, he suddenly felt something off as a strange resonance passed through him. It was Howl of Terror!

Howl of Terror was the most frightening skill of a Shadow Priest. It was Mind Control Magic. The number of Thieves who had died to the spell were by no means few. It was simply too hard to defend against, and its cast time was very brief. If a Thief was struck by Howl of Terror, they would lose all control over their body, allowing the Shadow Priest to easily dispatch them.

Nie Yan hastily activated Mind Immune from the Slaughter Fiend Medallion. As the eerie shriek entered his ears, his mind swam with numerous chaotic illusions. His movements halted, and the dagger stopped mid-strike.

Fortunately, Nie Yan activated Mind Immune just before the spell could fully wrest away control of his body. As the illusions in his mind disappeared, he plunged his dagger into Black Hell's body.

However, Smothering Strike was no longer active.

Nie Yan followed up with Backstab and Eviscerate. Black Hell's health instantly fell to critical levels, as a steady stream of poison and bleed damage floated up above his head.

Waving his staff, Black Hell self-cast a Lesser Heal, restoring a large chunk of his health, before hastily fleeing.

Nie Yan effortlessly caught up to Black Hell, then struck him in the back with Vital Strike. As Black Hell's health finally plummeted to zero, he collapsed to the ground.

Black Hell was truly a difficult opponent. Were it not for the fact that Nie Yan possessed several skills that countered the skills of a Shadow Priest, it would've taken a lot more effort to take him down.

"I win," Nie Yan muttered. He bent down to pick up the items Black Hell dropped—the Chapter of Harmony and the Dark Priest's Shadow Robes. He would unabashedly take the former for himself. But as for the latter, after thinking for a moment, he decided it was best to just return the item to its original owner.

## Chapter 215 – Chapter Of Harmony

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A rustling sound came from the trees beside Nie Yan, who spun around just in time to spot a player in white robes stepping out from behind the undergrowth.

“I’m Black Heaven,” Black Heaven explained, after seeing Nie Yan tightly gripping his dagger. He walked up to Black Hell’s corpse. He never thought his big brother would lose. Because in his mind, his big brother had always been invincible. He couldn’t help but spend a little while longer observing Nie Yan. The Mad Rogue, whose name was renowned across the entire Viridian Empire, didn’t look much older than him.

Because his big brother had told him not to interfere in the duel, Black Heaven had stayed off to the side, observing as a spectator.

Black Heaven had watched the entire battle, and he had to admit Nie Yan was really strong, one of the very few people that was a match for his big brother. The only thing that left him feeling puzzled was why Nie Yan remained unaffected despite having been plainly struck by Howl of Terror.

In such a short span of time, just what could Nie Yan have done to block the effects of Howl of Terror?

Black Heaven didn’t bother taking any precautions as he directly got to work on resurrecting Black Hell. Because of the bet his big brother made with Nie Yan earlier, he was confident Nie Yan wouldn’t act against him.

A gentle radiance gradually poured out of Black Heaven's palm.

Nie Yan sheathed his dagger, then stepped off to the side before sizing up Black Heaven. This person was a revered Archbishop in the previous timeline.

Black Heaven still looked a little immature, with the appearance of a seventeen or eighteen-year-old. Clad in pure-white robes, he carried a redwood staff which glowed with a dull radiance.

Nie Yan took particular note of the golden falcon stitched to the side of Black Heaven's collar. It was the symbol of the Temple of Light, which signified that the owner had learned the Templar Magic for their class. Almost all Templar Magic for the Priest class were blessings. Only at the later stages of the game could they learn other skills like formidable group revival spells.

Black Heaven was a Priest who could cast Templar Magic!

If Black Heaven really was willing to join Asskickers United, then Nie Yan would have truly picked up a treasure. The rarity of a Priest who could cast Templar Magic even surpassed that of a Mage who could cast advanced magic.

Due to a limited cast range, most Mages would have no choice but to get close to the action when they wanted to cast advanced magic. All advanced magic required at least one set of incantation gestures and syllables to cast, with many even requiring two or three sets. Who knows what might happen during that time? A



Paladin could rush up to the Mage with a low-level silencing spell and stop the advanced magic mid-cast.

Priests were different as they could cast Templar Magic in the relative safety of the backline or under the protection of numerous players. Even the lowest-ranking Templar Magic blessing would be able to raise the stats of an ally by 30%. At the later stages of the game, if a Priest learned rank 6 Templar Magic, they would be able to increase the fighting strength of their allies by over 200%, allowing even the most average of Warriors to transform into unstoppable tanks.

As such, Priests who knew Templar Magic were highly sought after by numerous large guilds.

If Nie Yan wanted to win the loyalty of a Priest like Black Heaven, he would have to do much more than winning a simple bet.

Let's wait for him to join first... Nie Yan thought it might be a good idea to have Black Heaven mingle with Young Seven's group. Once he grew closer with everyone, he would naturally become more willing to serve the guild's interests.

As Nie Yan gazed at Black Hell's corpse, a sense of regret overtook him. It was a pity Black Hell wasn't willing to join Asskickers United. His usage of anti-Thief spells had reached the cusp of perfection, and his overall PvP ability was truly deserving of admiration. If he hadn't honed his reaction speed over two lifetimes, he would've definitely fallen today.

Black Hell was certainly an expert among experts. For such a player to appear only several weeks after the game's release was really rare. He might have been an obscure figure in the previous timeline, but it absolutely wasn't due to a lack of skill.

Nie Yan felt confident Black Hell would go on to accomplish many amazing things in the future. As for why Black Hell wished to stay low-key, he had no way of knowing.

Since Black Hell was unwilling to leave Dark Hero, Nie Yan was helpless in the matter. All he could do was sigh with regret.

As a bright radiance descended on Black Hell, he was returned to life.

Black Hell opened his eyes and got back on his feet. Spotting Nie Yan off to the side, he said, "I lost. You're really strong." He was magnanimous in defeat.

"You as well," Nie Yan said with sincerity

"I've fulfilled one part of our bet. The Chapter of Harmony is already yours. As for Black Heaven, I'll let him withdraw from Dark Hero to join Asskickers United."

"Big Brother..." Black Heaven wanted to say something.

However, Black Hell waved his hand, cutting him off. "You'll have a much better future in Asskickers United. I'll continue

staying in Dark Hero. Besides, we can still level together, even if we're in different guilds." He'd been wanting to find a guild for his little brother for quite some time now, and he originally settled on Sapphire Shrine as well, because he had an old friend there. However, with Nie Yan's intervention, it seemed that was no longer possible. Nevertheless, Asskickers United wasn't a bad option either.

Seeing as nothing would be able to change his big brother's mind, Black Heaven could only drop the subject. Even if he joined Asskickers United, he could still meet with his big brother often.

"I'm entrusting Black Heaven to Asskickers United. I hope you guys won't mistreat him; otherwise, no matter how powerful your guild grows, I, Black Hell, will personally annihilate it. I'm a man of my word." Black Hell's eyes flashed with a cold light. He absolutely possessed the ability! Even though Dark Hero was in decline, so long as he revealed himself, he could immediately gather a powerful force that was capable of uprooting any guild.

"Don't worry, I've never treated any of the people under me unfairly," Nie Yan said with a faint smile.

Black Hell didn't respond with words but simply nodded his head.

"This is your Dark Priest's Shadow Robes. I'm returning it to you," Nie Yan said before handing over the piece of equipment to Black Hell.

“I have a question. How did you escape my Howl of Terror?” Black Hell asked. He couldn’t figure out where he had gone wrong.

“I have an item called the Slaughter Fiend Medallion. It has a supplementary skill that allows me to become immune to Mind Magic for three seconds,” Nie Yan explained.

“No wonder...” Black Hell nodded. So that was where he had miscalculated. When he PvPed in the future, he would definitely have to take note of such skills. However, for Nie Yan to be able to use a skill like that to counter his Howl of Terror was really impressive. His Howl of Terror lasted for two seconds. If Nie Yan’s timing had been off by even a little bit, the battle would’ve ended very differently. The reputation of the Mad Rogue was well deserved.

At the urging of Black Hell, Black Heaven withdrew from Dark Hero, and Nie Yan invited him into Asskickers United.

“If there are any guild expeditions, you can whisper me.” Black Heaven understood that his big brother valued honour above everything else. He also couldn’t do anything to go against his big brother’s principles.

Nie Yan nodded. “Aside from the occasional guild expedition, we don’t restrict the freedom of our guild members.” When they held a guild expedition later on, he would invite Black Heaven, so he could get more familiar with his fellow guild members.

Black Hell and Black Heaven bid farewell and departed. Staring at

Black Hell's back, Nie Yan couldn't help but sigh. Just what sort of background did Black Hell have? Why was he so low-key? It was truly a mystery.

The duel with Black Hell was quite exhilarating for Nie Yan. Black Hell really did have a lot of curses. On top of several crowd control skills, he was really difficult to deal with. With skills like that, it would definitely be a cinch for Black Hell to class advance into a Shadowmancer.

Nie Yan reminded himself there were still many powerful players in Conviction. Just because he comprehended the mysteries of a Shadow Dancer didn't mean he could look down on all the outstanding heroes of the world.

After settling his mind, Nie Yan examined the Chapter of Harmony.

### -Chapter of Harmony

Description: The fifth chapter of Volume I of the Book of Order. A fragment of a Legendary item. Whoever shall possess this chapter will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!

Properties: Receive 2 Intelligence and 1 mastery point every 5 levels. Focus +15, Willpower +15, Reflect +15, Strength +15, Dexterity +15.

Circle of Healing: Heal surrounding allies, up to a maximum

of 100 players, by 1000 health.

Cooldown: 5 days

Empower Status Magic: Increase the effects of all Curses and Blessings by 200%. Ignore all stun, paralysis, petrify, and similar crowd control effects.

Cooldown: 2 days

Restrictions: Can only be bound by a member of the Righteous Guardian of Order.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's bag.

The Chapter of Harmony was most useful on Priests.

Nie Yan checked his bag. It had a total of five chapters from the Book of Order. He now only needed the Chapter of Honesty, and he'd have collected all six chapters from Volume I of the Book of Order.

He already knew the exact location of the last chapter. However, he could delay retrieving it until after he finished powerlevelling Young Seven, Undying Scoundrel, and the others in Everlasting City. It was hidden in a Level 35 map, so he didn't have to worry too much.

「How's the progress on clearing your red names?」Nie Yan

inquired in the party chat.

「Very good. At our current pace, we'll be able to return to Calore by tomorrow morning at the latest,」Undying Scoundrel replied.

「That fast? How?」Nie Yan asked with a hint of surprise. Back then, it had taken Tang Yao quite a few days to fully clear his red name.

「We're rounding the Scaled Frogs up into a giant horde, then killing them all at once. Our red names go down pretty fast,」Summer Bug explained.

Nie Yan almost forgot. With several Mages using area-of-effect spells to kill large numbers of Scaled Frogs at once, of course their red names would be cleared pretty quickly.

After Nie Yan and the others spent a day mobbing Scaled Frogs, the entire group finally cleared their red names.

All of them activated Return Scrolls and returned to Calore.

“Is everyone here?” Nie Yan asked.

Everyone did a headcount. Off to the side, Undying Scoundrel said, “Everyone's accounted for.”

With the nine brothers who participated in the Kiln Fire Woods

operation, plus Nie Yan, Yao Yao, and Tang Yao, there were twelve people altogether.

Nie Yan nodded. “Since everyone is here, we can all set off. The goal this time is to get you all to Level 30!” It was about time he fulfilled the promise he made back at Kiln Fire Woods. Their destination was Everlasting City!

The group of players all let out excited cheers. They would finally get a taste of what it was like to level up, Nie Yan style.



# Chapter 216 – Everlasting Silver Set

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Everlasting City was still as tranquil as before, with Mechanical Golems in groups of several dozen wandering aimlessly through the streets. However, that tranquillity was broken when a group of players entered the city through the main gates.

“Sun and I will go round up the mobs, then take care of them. The rest of you can just sit back and enjoy the free experience,” Nie Yan said. The two of them were the most suitable for the task. A few Warriors could fill the role as well. However, Mages were simply too slow.

“Boss, we don’t have to do anything at all?”

“Yeah, nothing?”

“You guys can be responsible for picking up the drops,” Nie Yan lightly replied before dashing towards a group of Mechanical Golems in the distance.

Sun also followed behind, only a tad bit slower than Nie Yan.

「Boss, Heaven Breaker withdrew from the level leaderboards!」 Summer Bug informed in the group chat after noticing the change on the leaderboards.

Nie Yan checked the rankings. Heaven Breaker had indeed disappeared.

「What was his level before?」

「28,」Summer Bug replied before taking a final glance at the leaderboards.

「Level 28?」Nie Yan knitted his brows. He didn't expect Heaven Breaker to level so quickly. As the guild leader of Victorious Return, Heaven Breaker enjoyed the luxury of having his subordinates find fast levelling spots on his behalf. Even though he made his level private, he wouldn't easily give up on trying to reclaim his throne. In fact, he might be trying to overtake Tang Yao with even greater fervour.「Forget it, it's nothing to worry about.」

Nie Yan and Sun ran while simultaneously throwing Basic Magic Bombs.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」As the Basic Magic Bombs detonated over the crowd of Mechanical Golems, powerful blasts swept through the surroundings. Their destructive power was nothing short of breathtaking.

「Boss, where did you get those bombs? They're so powerful!」

「I got them from an NPC shop in Tasoyi Village,」Nie Yan replied.

「They're so awesome! Next time, I'm gonna buy some too!」

「Boss, how much do they cost?」Edgeless interjected. He saw through the crux of the problem. With how great the Basic Magic Bombs were for powerlevelling, they could easily get a player up to at least Level 35 in two or three days. However, Nie Yan and Tang Yao didn't bring too many people with them to Everlasting City. There was probably a very good reason for this.

「Two for 1 gold,」Nie Yan replied before throwing another Magic Bomb.「Boom!」It unleashed a fiery explosion that wreaked havoc on the Mechanical Golems.

「...」The group drew in a cool breath of air.

Just what did 1 gold signify? Even Level 20 Gold-grade equipment, save for one or two pieces of very specific Warrior and Priest equipment, generally couldn't be sold for 1 gold! Didn't that mean tossing out two Basic Magic Bombs was the same as tossing out a piece of Level 20 Gold-grade equipment?

Even rich tycoons couldn't afford to be so frivolous!

Although this method of levelling was very quick, the price was too steep!

Watching Nie Yan chucking Magic Bombs like tossing pebbles, the group members couldn't help but feel intense pain gripping at their hearts, like flesh being flayed off, piece by piece. Just how much money did he waste!?

The boss had spent so much money all for the sake of helping them level up. They were extremely touched. Many guild leaders were extremely miserly. They would detest doling out even the tiniest amount of merit points, for fear of depleting their guild's treasury. In stark contrast, Nie Yan was as magnanimous as the god of fortune.

Nie Yan understood that money was secondary. Young Seven, Sun, and the others were all figures who could call the wind and summon the rain in the previous timeline. The money that he spent on them now could be considered an investment to ensure their loyalty down the road. As for the other promising individuals in the guild, as long as they were willing to serve the guild, he would also think of ways to help them soar in level.

The effectiveness of the Magic Bombs was evident as close to 400 Mechanical Golems collapsed to the ground. Quite a few members in the group lit up with a flash of radiance.

Of the twelve members in the group, Nie Yan and five others levelled up. Nie Yan glanced at his status bar—Level 30. He didn't need to switch out his equipment just yet. He didn't touch his free stat points for now. If he obtained a piece of equipment with high stat requirements in the future, he could just allocate them then. As for his mastery points, he learned two new masteries—Magic Item Proficiency and Kicking.

Nie Yan raised Magic Item Proficiency to Junior, the highest rank he could go at his current level. It gave him +20% effectiveness on magic items, which meant he could now expect to deal an extra 120 damage on top of the 600 base damage from every Basic Magic

Bomb. The benefits of having such a mastery were as plain as day, allowing him to cut down on costs by a significant margin. He spent the rest of his mastery points raising Kicking to Intermediate. It was a useful mastery that allowed him to delay an enemy mid-cast, with a chance of directly disrupting them.

By the time Nie Yan finished allocating his mastery points, the members of the group had already found the drops among the debris on the ground. They stored all the loot into one place.

“Boss, you can store all these items in the treasury. We haven’t contributed at all, yet we’ve already cost the guild so much money. We don’t need anything,” Undying Scoundrel said on everyone’s behalf. He was normally pretty carefree, but even he understood it was improper for them to take the drops. If Nie Yan sold these items or stored them in the treasury, then at least he would be able to recuperate some of his losses.

“We don’t need any of these items. Use them to build up the guild treasury,” Bladelight said. Out of everyone in the group, he was only second to Nie Yan in terms of prestige, so his words carried quite a bit of authority.

Nie Yan nodded. “All these items will be stored in the treasury. If you need any of them, don’t hesitate to ask Guo Huai. As for the Energized Crystal Fragments, collect them and set them aside for Young Sparrow Hawk.”

Nie Yan’s group arrived at a public square which connected to various streets.

“The Warriors should start helping out as well. We’ll gather the Mechanical Golems in the surrounding area in this square,” Nie Yan said. This was the best location to do all the mobbing.

Bladelight, Edgeless, and the other Warriors also went to aggro the mobs. From all directions, Mechanical Golems were gathered at the heart of the plaza.

Nie Yan continuously threw Magic Bombs, causing explosions to sweep through the entire plaza. Mechanical Golems collapsed left and right, littering the ground with scrap metal and various pieces of equipment.

The members of the group rose rapidly in level, as the crisp, melodic jingles turned into a regular occurrence.

“Boss, this is awesome!”

“We’re levelling up so quickly!”

Nie Yan looked at the levels of the members in the group. They soared to Level 26 or 27. Two people already reached Level 28 even!

Edgeless, Monochrome, and the other Warriors started pulling the next wave of Mechanical Golems with even more fervour, while the other members began picking up all the loot off the ground.

Nie Yan checked the harvest. They already had 32 Energized Crystal Fragments. Soon, Tang Yao would be able to resurrect his Arcane Fairy.

“Boss, do you know what kind of equipment this is?” Summer Bug asked after picking up a very dark piece of plate armour covered in runes. Its design was simple and unadorned. With one look, you could tell it was an artifact from a bygone era. It emitted a cold, ancient aura.

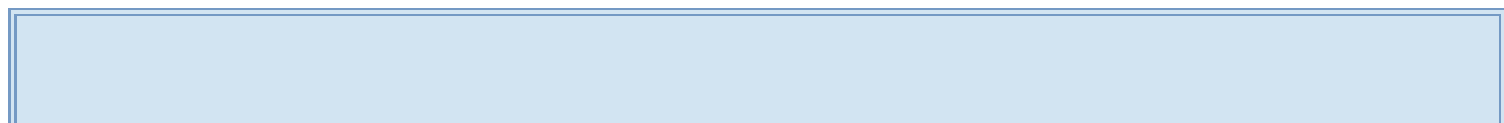
“I found something similar over here too. It’s a pair of gauntlets.” Off in the distance, Miracle Dancer picked up a similar piece of equipment.

The group members really did have a sharp gaze. They could immediately tell these pieces of equipment were out of the ordinary.

Nie Yan stared at the chest armour in Summer Bug’s hands. It was covered in forbidden magic runes. It’s part of that set, no mistake.

“They’re part of the Everlasting Set. Bring them over,” Nie Yan said, unable to hold back his emotions.

After receiving the gauntlets and chest armour, Nie Yan appraised both of them.



## Everlasting Chestplate (Silver)

Requirements: Level 30, 270 Strength, 160 Dexterity

Set Items: Chestplate, Gauntlets, Leg Armour, Shoulder Guards, Cape, Horned Helmet, Greaves, Heavy Shield

Properties: Heavy Armour, Metal Defense, Defense 330–339, Damage Absorption +5%, Magic Resistance +10%, Maximum Health +10%, reduce the level requirements of the other set items by 10 when this armour is equipped.

Restrictions: Fighter

## Everlasting Gauntlets (Silver)

Requirements: Level 40

Set Items: Chestplate, Gauntlets, Leg Armour, Shoulder Guards, Cape, Horned Helmet, Greaves, Heavy Shield

Properties: Heavy Armour, Metal Defense, Defense 220–238, Damage Absorption +2%, Magic Resistance +3%, Maximum Health +5%

Restrictions: Fighter



The Everlasting Series was produced in Everlasting City. It was divided into three sets: Silver, Gold, and Dark Gold. The Gold and Dark Gold sets only dropped from Elites, while the Silver set could be found on ordinary monsters.

Due to how many parts this set comprised, completing it posed some difficulty. Nonetheless, Its properties were great, even better than the Level 35 Gold Storm Set. It was an exceptional defensive set for Fighters at the early stage of the game. If all the set items were gathered, the player would receive a set bonus in the form of a Rank 6 Shield.

More often than not, the difficulty of obtaining something determined how much it was coveted. Not only was defense focused Fighter equipment simply too rare, they were also in great demand. So if a good piece of equipment for a Fighter were put up for auction, even the most miserly of guild leaders wouldn't hesitate to break the bank.

“This is something for you. Let's see if we can gather the full set. Since we have the chestplate, it means you can equip the other parts of the set at a much lower level,” Nie Yan said before handing the chestplate and gauntlets to Bladelight. If they could help him gather all the parts of the Everlasting Silver Set, which would allow him to tank high-level Lords, then during the upcoming guild expedition, they could try their luck at challenging much higher level Lords.

Bladelight looked over the two items, then exclaimed in a slightly surprised tone, “The properties are pretty good. What about the set bonus?”

“There’s a description of this set online. The set bonus is a Rank 6 Shield,” Nie Yan replied. It was precisely the Rank 6 Shield that made the set so great. Without it, the set’s value would be much lower. The Rank 6 Shield allowed a Fighter to tank the hits of a Lord in an enraged state. To any team, this was extremely important.

“Wow, that’s pretty good,” Bladelight’s heart was swayed. The notion of equipping a Level 40 defensive set at only Level 30 was very attractive to him.

“How far are you from meeting the stat requirements?”

“I’m a bit short from fulfilling the Dexterity requirement,” Bladelight replied.

The difference in Dexterity could be made up by socketing Dexterity Gems. If they could complete the Everlasting Silver Set, an unrivalled Level 30 Fighter would be born!

# Chapter 217 – Defeat Of Holy Empire

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“If we clear out the Mechanical Golems in the area, we might be able to cobble together an entire Everlasting Set. The drop rates are higher when exploring new maps,” Nie Yan encouraged the team. Although the pieces of the Everlasting Silver Set were rare, their drop rate wasn’t outrageous. Adding onto this was the fact they were the first to clear this map, so there was a definite hope of them collecting all the pieces of the set.

If Asskickers United had an extremely powerful Fighter, the entire guild would be able to obtain equipment an entire tier better than what they had now. The main team’s gear was already lagging behind their level at this point.

With the knowledge that the Everlasting Set could drop from this area, everyone worked even harder. Sun and the Warriors ran deeper into the city, luring wave after wave of Mechanical Golems over to the square.

Nie Yan just sat there, launching one Basic Magic Bomb after another almost non-stop. Mechanical Golem corpses piled up almost as fast as they disappeared.

The group’s levels continued to soar.

Nie Yan glanced at the level leaderboards. Asskickers United occupied the first, third, fifth, sixth, and seventh spots. Of course, there were also the players like Nie Yan who kept their levels hidden from the leaderboards. To have a single guild occupy half of

the top 10 was already shocking enough. Taking up the entire top ten would truly be too brash.

The playerbase was going wild. Asskickers United was too powerful. Almost the entire upper half of the level leaderboards belonged to them.

Countless players flooded toward the Asskickers United headquarters, even more frenzied than before. Many of the new applicants held thoughts of freeloading in their minds. Perhaps, Nie Yan would be in a good mood one day and decide to take everyone on a group power-leveling session, allowing them to instantly level up several times over without having to grind. Guo Huai continued to raise the bar for new applicants, even requiring them to pass a series of tests now. For every hundred players wanting to join Asskickers United, perhaps only a mere five or six of them would actually get the chance to join.

There had never been such a guild before. One that imposed harsh requirements on potential members and still had skilled players lining up to join. The ones that didn't make the cut weren't just sent on their way. For them, Guo Huai established two branch guilds, Mages' Division and Warriors' Division, which absorbed members from the crowd of rejected players. Despite being branch guilds, they shared a collective treasury with Asskickers United.

Asskickers United had a slow and controlled growth, as each and every member could be considered amongst the elites of an ordinary guild. The sheer concentration of experts would leave any onlooker utterly speechless.

At first, the players who joined Asskickers United early on sighed in relief. Many of them had no confidence in passing the entrance test. However, Guo Huai quickly made their hearts sink to rock-bottom with the announcement of mandatory testing for all members a week later. Those who could not pass would be relegated to a branch division. They would have to work hard and pass the test if they wanted to rejoin the main guild. On the other side of the coin, those that did pass the test would receive far greater benefits than before. With both harsh penalties and abundant rewards on the line, all members desperately tried to improve themselves in preparation.

Additionally, the in-game currency collection was a spectacular success. In order to wear strong gear at Level 30, the members of Asskickers United donated a large sum of money to the guild. The average guild member could find over a dozen Silver to spare, while the richest players donated up to one or even two Gold. It was only now that Guo Huai realized just how filthy rich the members of Asskickers United were. Even the poorest of them scraped together enough Silver to take advantage of the good merit point exchange rate, redeeming their points for various pieces of equipment.

There was already 1,200 Gold in the guild's treasury, but the frenzied donations had only just begun.

「You're certainly impressive. I was wondering why so many players came all at once to our headquarters to apply to the guild. I took a break and checked the leaderboards... like half of it is ours! It took us until now to handle this wave of applicants,」Guo Huai messaged. Asskickers United had such a spectacular lineup on the level leaderboards!

「How much Gold has the guild collected so far?」Nie Yan inquired.

「We're already at 1200 Gold, and it's still going up. I predict we'll have two to three thousand Gold by tomorrow.」

Nie Yan sank into thought. Even Guo Huai's higher estimate of three thousand Gold might not be enough for the auction house at the center of Calore. He needed to prepare some extra money from other sources. Fortunately, the Starry Night Potion Shop had also accumulated quite a bit of profit.

「There's something important I have to tell you about. Radiant Sacred Flame and Holy Empire both just upgraded to Level 5 guilds, and fought a major guild war,」Guo Huai informed. He received this information only moments ago.

Nie Yan responded in surprise,「Wow, they're fast. They're even a step ahead of Victorious Return on that front.」

「Victorious Return really took a hit during your escapade at Kiln Fire Woods. They fell flat on their faces, losing more than half of their elites. It'll take them some time and effort to catch back up before they can push for Level 5.」

「How did the war between Radiant Sacred Flame and Holy Empire go?」Nie Yan urgently inquired. Asskickers United agreed to an alliance with Holy Empire not long ago, while Radiant Sacred Flame was affiliated with Victorious Return. The outcome of this

conflict would directly affect the interests of Asskickers United.

「Holy Empire lost—miserably. They sent an army of fifty thousand to the battlefield, only to have two-thirds of them die. Radiant Sacred Flame barely lost ten thousand people.」Guo Huai sighed deeply. If Holy Empire was dealt a fatal blow, Asskickers United would lose a trustworthy ally.

「How did Holy Empire lose that badly?」Nie Yan was shocked.

「No one expected Radiant Sacred Flame to be so strong. They have a unit of a thousand Berserkers, all armed to the teeth with terrifying equipment. That group alone slaughtered Holy Empire to the point where there was nothing they could even do. Here, I'll send you a video of the battle,」Guo Huai explained as he forwarded the video to Nie Yan.

At first, Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame fought each other to a standstill. Although casualties were high, neither side suffered meaningful losses. That changed when Radiant Sacred Flame struck out with their thousand Berserker battalion. Like a sharp dagger, it cut through Holy Empire's front line and began massacring the players in the rear. Holy Empire could only sound a full retreat. Despite using immense efforts to kill the thousand Berserker battalion, they couldn't. Holy Empire was unable to salvage the situation as over a hundred Berserkers got out unscathed.

Holy Empire was dealt a crippling blow, but Radiant Sacred Flame hadn't gotten off lightly either. Taking a breather, both sides set up camp and began to recuperate.

Nie Yan understood why the two guilds were in such a bitter conflict. Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame had simultaneously risen to Level 5 guilds. With two guild promoting to Level 5, a small stronghold would open in Calore. The competition to control the stronghold made the guilds' fight to the death finally make sense.

He predicted that a few days later, both guilds would send out an army of two thousand for another bout. Before the stronghold's owner was decided, one final battle would erupt.

Both guilds would certainly ask for aid from other parties. Nie Yan expected Holy Empire to come to Asskickers United for help. He also felt certain that Sleepy Fox would also beseech the help of Sapphire Shrine and Battle Crazy Alliance. He might even try to hire some experts from major gaming organizations. Radiant Sacred Flame would definitely be doing the same with its allies.

The [war of the guilds](#) was far from over. Before the stronghold had an owner, both guilds were fated to clash. For now, the first round was won by Radiant Sacred Flame, putting Holy Empire at a disadvantage. In the previous timeline, Holy Empire had been able to hold its own despite constantly being inferior to both Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

「Give our guild members a heads up, telling them to earn more guild Honour in preparation for our upgrade to Level 4,」Nie Yan instructed. Asskickers United was simply established too late. Because of that, they were far behind Holy Empire, Radiant Sacred Flame, and the other major guilds. Asskickers United needed to



pick up its pace. Strongholds were a guild's true foundation for progress.

「I'm currently arranging it. We're not far off from Level 4. You gotta return Bladelight and Young Seven to us soon, though.」 Resplendent Bladelight and Leader Young Seven were needed because they were the leaders of the guild's main team.

「They're almost Level 30, so they'll head back soon,」Nie Yan said. The people who hit Level 30 had already voluntarily left the party to avoid leeching experience. Even so, Nie Yan's supply of Basic Magic Bombs dwindled rapidly, and as they did, Bladelight and Young Seven got ever so close to Level 30.

「Another group is here to join the guild.」

「Alright then, you go deal with them,」Nie Yan said. The guild's affairs came first.

Over the course of killing nearly 3,000 Mechanical Golems, their group found pieces of the Everlasting Set here and there. They actually managed to grab six parts of the set: the Heavy Shield, Chestplate, Gauntlets, Cape, Horned Helmet, and Leg Armour. They even got a spare Cape and Horned Helmet. Their luck was good, and they only lacked two pieces now.

As another batch of Mechanical Golems was blasted into smithereens, Resplendent Bladelight finally reached Level 30. He put five points into Dexterity, which gave him just enough to equip the Everlasting Set. The dark metallic gear flashed with an

impressive luster. With it on, Bladelight seemed immoveable and incredibly well-armoured. Mysterious runes shone on the surface, radiating a frigid aura.

“Just gotta grab the Greaves and Shoulder Guards now,” Nie Yan commented. Once they got the final two pieces, the set would be complete. “What are your stats now?”

“I have 1653 Defense, 35% Block Rate, 43% Magic Resistance, and over 1,200 health,” Resplendent Bladelight answered. Fighters already had higher defense and health than other classes, but Bladelight’s current stats were insane. With this set equipped, he could be said to be ridiculously overpowered.

Nie Yan frowned and asked, “What about your attack?”

“Three hundred and seventy,” Bladelight replied. He also felt that something was off here. “My defenses make me an impregnable fortress, but I can’t hold aggro with such low attack. It’s a huge problem if a boss’s aggro doesn’t concentrate on me.”

“Get a bunch of high-aggro skills, I guess. Have Guo Huai find some skill books for you. Next time we do a guild activity, we’ll find a good one-handed sword for you to use,” Nie Yan promised. Just his defense alone made Resplendent Bladelight worthy of being called the number one Fighter in the game. If his stats were leaked to other Fighters, they would probably go crazy with shame and envy.

With such an overpowered Fighter, the guild could do a lot of

things that it couldn't before. Nie Yan suddenly had an idea. After we finish leveling here, we could go look for a Super Variant Lord to test ourselves, and pick up a Sub Legendary item while we're at it.

# Chapter 218 – Vying For The Stronghold

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Super Variant Lords are too powerful. I'm not sure if Bladelight can hold up against one... Nie Yan weighed the matter seriously. It's better not to bite off more than we can chew for now. He filed away the dangerous thought at the back of his mind. A Sub Legendary item wasn't something a person could just obtain on a whim. He didn't want his own reckless nature to cause the death of countless guild members. Regular Lords for now... After everyone has risen in level and gotten better equipment, I'll consider whether or not we should take on a Super Variant then.

Nie Yan checked his status bar. He was now Level 33. The group members left the party upon reaching Level 30. Undying Scoundrel, Monochrome, Edgeless, and three others were the first to leave. Although they left the party, they still stuck around to help round up the mobs. Resplendent Bladelight was the most recent player that hit level 30. He also left the party, leaving more experience for the others. There were still four more members at Level 29, but it wouldn't be long before they gained that last level.

Another wave of mobs was aggroed over. Seeing the hordes of Mechanical Golems surge into the square from every street, Nie Yan was taken aback. How are there are still so many left? Did they aggro all the Mechanical Golems in the outer district? Because of his repeated warnings, none of the group members dared to venture into the central region of Everlasting City.

An endless shower of Magic Bombs rained down from the sky. 「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Mechanical Golems collapsed to the ground, several dozen at a time.

Before long, the square was covered with mounds of scrap metal.

The group members began picking up the loot.

“Did the greaves and shoulder guards drop?” Nie Yan asked. The most pressing matter right now was helping Bladelight complete the Everlasting Silver Set.

“Found the shoulder guards!” Summer Bug exclaimed after picking up a piece of equipment.

“The leg armour dropped over here.”

“We already have the leg armour!”

“Let’s try a few more waves. The greaves should drop.”

Nie Yan checked his bag. He only had a little over 300 Magic Bombs remaining. Nearly 700 Magic Bombs disappeared in the blink of the eye. This expenditure was truly staggering!

After doing some calculations, the group realized Nie Yan spent 500 gold to help them on this trip to Everlasting City, and this fact struck all of them with guilt. They never expected the cost of power levelling to be so steep. In retrospect, the request they made back at Kiln Fire Woods was more than a little excessive.

“Boss, we’ve let you down by squandering so much of the guild’s wealth,” Undying Scoundrel said apologetically. After all, he was one of the main culprits who pestered Nie Yan to take them levelling.

“I wouldn’t really call getting you all to Level 30 squandering, but if we can collect the entire Everlasting Silver Set then this trip will have been well worth it. It’s only 500 gold. Money spent can be still earned back later,” Nie Yan said with a smile. Even though 500 gold was a great sum, a significant boost in the strength of the guild’s core elites wasn’t a bad trade-off.

“Boss, you really know how to touch a person’s heart. From now on, I’ll follow you no matter what the future holds. Just say the word, and I’ll definitely be at your beck and call!” Undying Scoundrel half-jokingly declared.

Nie Yan chuckled. “Alright, enough with the flattery. You guys can equip the sets of Level 30 Gold equipment in the guild treasury now. Just give Guo Huai a holler when you get back, and he’ll let you withdraw them.”

“How is that fine? We can’t keep freely taking stuff from the guild. That won’t be fair to the other guild members! I already have over 6,000 merit points. If I donate a few more pieces of equipment, I’ll have enough for a full set of Level 30 Gold equipment. I’ll just exchange the set I have equipped right now,” Summer Bug said. He understood that the guild was still in the initial stage of its development. Every player had to contribute their fair share. A rising tide would lift the boat. Only then could the entire guild grow stronger together.

The rest of the group nodded in agreement with Summer Bug. They would be reimbursed with merit points for donating their old equipment anyway. The guild treasury existed to benefit everyone in Asskickers United, not just the top ranking members.

If every member only thought for their own interests, the guild would never grow.

Three more members levelled up. Only Young Seven still hadn't reached Level 30. As a Priest, he had the most difficult time levelling, so he always lagged behind the others by a bit.

Nie Yan thought for a moment, then turned to Young Seven and said, "I still have some Magic Bombs left. Let's get you to Level 32, alright?"

Since Priests were the slowest class at levelling, Young Seven would inevitably be overtaken by the others. By helping him get in a few more levels now, he wouldn't fall as far behind.

"That's a little wasteful, isn't it...?" Young Seven asked, sounding a little hesitant.

"It doesn't matter. Levelling will be super fast with just the two of us," Nie Yan replied. Without having to share the experience among all the other members, he would be able to get Young Seven to Level 32 in no time.

“I guess it’s fine.” Young Seven shrugged after thinking for a moment. As a Priest, he knew how important he was to the main team, so he didn’t decline the offer.

Another wave was aggroed over to the public square. A series of blasts buffeted the Mechanical Golems, decimating sections of the crowd at a time as they exploded into scrap metal.

「[Ding dong!](#)」A crisp system jingle rang out as Nie Yan hit Level 34. He didn’t expect to be approaching Level 35 so soon. The [Skywalker Set](#) was still sitting in his bag. Who knew before he could even find a suitable opportunity to equip this defensive Thief set, he would already have to start searching for Level 35 and Level 40 equipment? However, with the stats of the Skywalker Set, he would be fine wearing it all the way to Level 40. At worst, he would have to socket it with gems. Even then, since it was Dark Gold-grade, upgrading it was pretty cost effective.

A bright radiance descended on Young Seven as he reached Level 30, with his experience bar filling up until it stopped at 86%. Since the experience was shared with two instead of twelve, his levelling speed increased by sixfold.

After the last Mechanical Golem fell, the group scattered around the square in search for drops.

“I found another Everlasting Chestplate,” Summer Bug said with pleasant surprise. It was the most important piece of the set, allowing the player to equip all the other pieces at Level 30 instead of Level 40.



“Not bad.” Nie Yan was pleased. Even if they couldn’t complete the Everlasting Silver Set, the properties of the individual pieces weren’t bad. Especially when worn at Level 30, it would bolster the player’s defensive capabilities by a significant degree. With another chestplate, the other spare pieces could be more easily equipped.

“The greaves dropped!” Edgeless cried out as he held up a piece of equipment. At last, the Everlasting Silver Set was complete.

The last two parts were traded to Bladelight. After equipping the Everlasting Silver Set, Bladelight’s entire body was clad in solid, metal armour. This set was not one bit inferior to a full set of Level 30 Dark Gold equipment. Its formidable defensive capabilities allowed a Fighter to look down on any Level 30 Lord. Even going up against a Level 30 Super Variant Lord was possible.

With Young Seven reaching Level 30 too, we’re almost set for the guild expedition, Nie Yan thought.

As everyone helped Young Seven power level to Level 32, Nie Yan’s chat rang. He checked the caller ID; it was Sleepy Fox. You couldn’t resist any longer, huh? Let’s see what you have to say, he mused before answering the call.

「You guys sure are impressive. The entire top of the leaderboards is filled with players from your guild!」Sleepy Fox praised, unable to hold back his envy. It would be great if he could have so many experts under him.

The current situation was that Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were the strongest, while Asskickers United had the greatest number of experts. As for Holy Empire, the only thing they could do was to place all of their hopes on the stronghold. If they successfully occupied it, they would undergo a meteoric rise. If it was snatched away by Radiant Sacred Flame, they would have no choice but to lay low for a while because Radiant Sacred Flame would definitely try to beat them further while they were down.

「You wouldn't be contacting me just to talk about the leaderboards, right?」Nie Yan chuckled. He was much more relaxed and carefree than Sleepy Fox.

「How about you send that group of experts in your guild to help me capture the stronghold?」Sleepy Fox finally cut straight to the chase. The upcoming battle for the small stronghold would be conducted under the supervision of the Viridian Empire. Both sides would have a maximum of 2,000 players. Whichever side captured the stronghold would have ownership of it for five months, after which it could be freely fought over again. Even if Holy Empire could only control the stronghold for five months, the amount of gold they would gain from collecting taxes during that time was extremely enticing. It was enough to allow them to flourish.

No other guild came close to having as many experts as Asskickers United did.

「We only signed a defense pact. Asskickers United is under no obligation to help you seize that stronghold, right?」Nie Yan asked.

Dispatching his own experts to help Holy Empire win the stronghold battle entailed a huge risk. If the compensation wasn't satisfactory, he wouldn't act. As a guild leader, it was necessary for him to consider the guild's interests first.

「I want to employ the services of just the ten of you. 200 gold, are you interested?」Sleepy Fox said. What he meant by just the ten of you was precisely Nie Yan and the other nine who had massacred over 500 players from Unhindered in Kiln Fire Woods. A 200 gold commission fee was an exorbitant amount. It was truly enough to leave people speechless.

「Wow, you really are putting us on a pedestal,」Nie Yan replied. He estimated 200 gold was enough for Sleepy Fox to hire a top-notch 200-player gaming organization to throw their lives away for him, while the same amount was offered just to hire the ten of them. Truthfully speaking, however, 200 gold was nothing to Nie Yan. He was simply too rich, to the extent that he wasn't even the slightest bit swayed by the amount Sleepy Fox offered.

「You guys are worth the price,」Sleepy Fox said. He believed that with the current working relationship between both guilds, his offer should be enough to get Nie Yan to act.

Unfortunately, Nie Yan had something different in mind.

「I can dispatch 100 players that will boost your chances of capturing the stronghold to 80% or higher. However, 200 gold won't cut it. If I help your guild in the upcoming siege battle, I want a 30% ownership stake in the stronghold,」Nie Yan said. It seemed he wanted a much bigger piece of the pie.

「How are you so sure of the outcome?」Sleepy Fox asked. He had hired experts from everywhere, but he still didn't feel assured about seizing the stronghold. Why was Nie Yan so confident?

「Just think it over by yourself.」Nie Yan was still calm after Sleepy Fox called him into question. The number of experts in Asskickers United was beyond Sleepy Fox's imagination. It was far greater than all the several major guilds combined. If Sleepy Fox had asked him to participate in a larger scale battle in the tens of thousands, he wouldn't be able to guarantee anything. However, since it was only a 2,000 player battle, Asskickers United dispatching 100 players to join forces with Holy Empire should be enough to wipe the floor with Radiant Sacred Flame.

## Chapter 219 – Gathering Of Elites

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Sleepy Fox hesitated for some time. A 30% share of the stronghold was no insignificant sum. It was the same as asking him to carve out a large piece of his own flesh. However, Nie Yan wasn't the type of person who spoke carelessly. If he didn't have the confidence, he wouldn't speak such big words.

「Can't you be a bit more generous? Do a friend a favour?」Sleepy Fox wryly smiled. Nie Yan was truly a ruthless negotiator. Holy Empire had put in all the painstaking effort of ranking up to a Level 5 guild in order to finally gain the qualifications to vie for the stronghold. It wasn't even Asskickers United's battle, yet they wanted to bite off almost a third of the profits in one fell swoop!

「If you just asked for my personal help, I would've agreed, even for free. However, since you're requesting the aid of my guild, the interests of my guild brothers naturally takes precedence,」Nie Yan said in a sincere tone. As the guild leader, he couldn't concede the slightest inch in matters related to the guild's growth.

「Hah, that much I understand.」Sleepy Fox deeply sighed. He was also a guild leader, so he understood the sentiment well. Sometimes, even if an action ran the risk of offending people, he would still force himself to go through with it for the sake of the numerous brothers in his guild. Nie Yan had already given his offer, and both sides didn't hold any apprehensions toward each other.

「If you agree, I'll send 100 players over to you. If not, then so be it,」Nie Yan said. Even though 30% was a little excessive, he

genuinely believed the brothers under his command were worth that price.

「Let me give it some more thought. 30% isn't a small amount after all. Other than that, I want to further assess the strength of the people under you. Prove to me that they're worth what you're asking for,」Sleepy Fox replied. He couldn't simply take Nie Yan's words at face value, lest he be so foolish as to give away 30% of the profit for nothing. However, if the people under Nie Yan really were strong enough to help him seize the stronghold, then what harm was there in accepting the offer? The other 70% would still belong to him, and it was better than having nothing.

「No problem. Wait for me to finish levelling, then I'll send them to the arena to show off their skills. You should bring a few people to watch,」Nie Yan replied. If they wanted to earn 30% of the profit, then it was only natural for his guild to bring out some real ability.

「How much longer till you guys are done levelling?」

「An hour at most.」

「Alright, send me a whisper when you're done,」Sleepy Fox said. He wanted to see just how strong the players of Asskickers United were for Nie Yan to dare to boast that a hundred of them could ensure an 80% chance of successfully seizing the stronghold.

「How goes the battle with Radiant Sacred Flame?」Nie Yan asked. The current scale of the conflict probably wasn't large enough for Holy Empire to receive any serious damage.

「One word. Disastrous. We've already suffered over 50,000 casualties,」Sleepy Fox replied with a bitter smile. In order to secure the stronghold, both sides didn't hesitate to go all out, no matter the price they had to pay.

「That much?」Nie Yan asked in shock.

「We lost over 30,000 players in the previous battle, and another 20,000 or so from minor skirmishes that broke out in various places. However, Radiant Sacred Flame isn't fairing that much better either. They've lost at least 40,000 players,」Sleepy Fox explained. Holy Empire had previously always held the advantage. The number of Radiant Sacred Flame players who died by their hands wasn't small. However, the crushing defeat they suffered caused the number of casualties on their side to soar and exceed that of Radiant Sacred Flame.

「The difference in casualties between both sides actually isn't all that bad,」Nie Yan said. However, Holy Empire probably came out of the battle a little worse off. The loss in equipment definitely wasn't insignificant.

「Not bad? It's a difference of over 10,000 players! I got to see some of the true strength of Radiant Sacred Flame in that battle. Those bastards really hid it well, like that thousand Berserker battalion. Those players were previously all members of Asura. However, the moment the battle started, all of them joined Radiant Sacred Flame! God knows if they still have any other branches in reserve,」Sleepy Fox said gloomily. This time, Radiant Sacred Flame had truly beaten him black and blue.

Asura? Nie Yan recalled that Asura was currently a Level 2 guild with 20,000 members. Their strength wasn't bad. He wasn't all too familiar with many guilds in his past life. He didn't think he would reincarnate ten years into the past, let alone become the leader of one; otherwise, he would've researched this sort of behind the scenes information a bit more. He was much more knowledgeable on things like where to find the best grinding spots, but even then, he definitely didn't know everything.

In the previous timeline, the fact that Holy Empire, Battle Crazy Alliance, and Sapphire Shrine couldn't do anything to Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return wasn't without logic.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were like the blade of a guillotine hanging over Nie Yan's neck. As soon as Cao Xu entered the playing field, the future would become very hard to predict. If Asskickers United was able to defeat Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, he would have a bright road ahead of him. However, if it went the other way around, the events of the previous timeline would very likely repeat themselves.

I'll help Holy Empire seize the stronghold first, then decide what to do from there. Weakening Radiant Sacred Flame also benefits Asskickers United.

「Let me focus on levelling for now. I'll whisper you when I return to Calore,」Nie Yan said after spotting Bladelight, Sun, and the others bringing in another wave of Mechanical Golems.



「Alright,」Sleepy Fox said before hanging up the call.

Nie Yan continued raining down Basic Magic Bombs on the square as Mechanical Golems collapsed to the ground in droves. Checking his bag, he counted over 80 Energized Crystal Fragments. Add those to the over 30 fragments in Tang Yao's possession, and they had enough for a Energized Crystal Core. The revival of Tang Yao's Arcane Fairy was also important in helping Holy Empire seize the stronghold. When Tang Yao would find out they could finally resurrect his Arcane Fairy, he would absolutely be brimming with joy. Pair this to the fact that he had just recently obtained a Slaughter Fiend Medallion, and it could even be said that he was as pleased as punch.

Nie Yan informed Guo Huai he would be needing the elites of the guild, the members who formed Asskickers United's core, and asked him to make a selection. He definitely couldn't allow Sleepy Fox to look down on them.

The number of strong players in Asskickers United was as numerous as the trees in a forest. Almost 70% of all the top-notch elites in Calore belonged to them, so picking out a hundred was like searching for sand at the beach, it couldn't be any easier. Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame were currently evenly matched, but the people Nie Yan planned to dispatch to the battle would definitely greatly tip the scale in Holy Empire's favour. However, the enemy still couldn't be underestimated. Radiant Sacred Flame would definitely be able to find many strong players as well.

After clearing two more waves, Young Seven finally levelled up to Level 32, reaching their goal faster than originally expected.

“We’re returning to Calore. Holy Empire is waiting for us,” Nie Yan said to the group members after they picked up all the drops from the ground.

Everyone activated Return Scrolls and returned to Calore. When they arrived back at the guild headquarters, Nie Yan deposited their harvest from this trip into the treasury. With the sudden influx of new Level 40 equipment, the guild members were given another shock.

“I’ve already sent the players. I kept everything under wraps by reserving the entire arena,” Guo Huai said. The meeting of the two guilds absolutely couldn’t be leaked.

“How much was the reservation fee?”

“Not much, only 5 gold,” Guo Huai replied. In order to maintain secrecy, it was necessary to spend this sort of money.

“Just send the bill over to Sleepy Fox. Let him pay for the reservation fee. If we can save a little, then why not?” Nie Yan said. There was no need to act polite by paying for the arena reservation fee. Besides, this exhibition between the two guilds was only happening because Sleepy Fox cast doubts on the strength of the players from Asskickers United.

“...” Guo Huai had no words to describe Nie Yan at this moment. He didn’t bat an eyelid when he spent 500 gold on levelling. However, in a major affair such as the experts of two powerhouses

duelling, he wasn't even willing to fork up 5 gold, shamelessly wanting Sleepy Fox to shoulder the cost instead.

“Alright, if you say so... I'll let him know.”

Guo Huai could imagine just what kind of expression Sleepy Fox would have on his face when he received the bill. He probably wouldn't know whether to laugh or cry. However, before long, he received 5 gold from Sleepy Fox through the mail without complaint. It seemed everything between Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox was pretty cut and dry.

“If we don't owe the other side anything, then we shouldn't have to pay a single cent. Especially with the guild leaders from the large guilds, there's absolutely no need to be courteous to them. It's not like they're lacking in money anyway,” Nie Yan laughed before patting Guo Huai's shoulders.

Guo Huai learned a new lesson from Nie Yan.

Nie Yan brought Bladelight, Undying Scoundrel, Young Seven, and the others with him to the arena.

Calore's arena was a round building that resembled a colosseum. It had a wide open space in the center encompassed by countless spectator seats. It was capable of accommodating several thousand players. When there were no events going on in the city, reserving the entire place cost 5 gold which wasn't too steep of a price.

Nie Yan's group entered the arena. Close to a hundred players were already there waiting. They belonged to Asskickers United. Nie Yan saw several familiar faces: Tuoba Time, Very Forthright, Natural Fiend, One Strike Vow, and many others were all present. With their skills, they naturally ranked in the top hundred of the guild.

When One Strike Vow spotted Bladelight among Nie Yan's group, she went over to greet them.

One Strike Vow wore light blue leather armour which perfectly hugged the contours of her body. She was charming and elegant but didn't lack any sex appeal. In terms of looks, she wasn't any inferior to Yao Yao or Yu Lan. Add in her potential to become a Shadow Dancer, and it was no wonder she was worshipped by so many as a goddess in the previous timeline. Her gaze swept everyone in the group before finally falling on Bladelight. The two smiled at each other.

An affair? When Undying Scoundrel and a few others watched this scene play out, they couldn't help but feel their hearts turn sour. This beautiful maiden only spared them a simple glance before focusing her attention on Bladelight. She even smiled at him, and it was the affectionate kind too! Even a fool could spot that she was in love!

"Boss Bladelight, is she your girlfriend?" several members asked.

One Strike Vow's face immediately blushed red, but she didn't offer up an explanation.

Bladelight faintly smiled before shaking his head. “No, we’re just really good friends.”

Disappointment flashed across One Strike Vow’s face but only for the briefest instant before resuming her brilliant smile.

“We’re like brother and sister.”

Like brothers and sisters? Everyone showed confused expressions.

Nie Yan could actually see through the type of relationship they had. It was a pity that Bladelight couldn’t tell that One Strike Vow had feelings for him. However, these sorts of matters were best resolved by the two parties involved.

“Boss, you guys finally arrived.” Natural Fiend and many others came up to greet Nie Yan.

“Hey, buddy! You’re here!” Forthright’s loud voice rang out, instantly drowning out the others in the crowd.

Tuoba Time revealed a lazy smile.

There were one hundred elite players!

Nie Yan greeted all of them. As he looked over each of their faces,

he felt a sense of heroic spirit bursting from his chest. This was a galaxy of talent! With so many elites gathered together, why would he worry about being defeated by Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame?

## Chapter 220 – Dueling Holy Empire

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With so many people present, Nie Yan couldn't possibly be familiar with every single face. But of the individuals he did recognize, he knew them as some of the very top elites of the game in the previous timeline. He naturally didn't believe his charisma was enough to convince all of them to willingly serve him without complaint. However, so long as they integrated into the tight-knit community of the guild, they would inevitably turn into comrades who would go through thick and thin with him. Beyond the sentiment, they were also bound by contracts so none of them would dare betray the guild.

The crowd of players quietly discussed among themselves about their guild leader, Nirvana Flame. They had long since heard of the Mad Rogue whose name rang through the ears of all players like thunder. Even so, as top elites in the game, none of them felt they were lacking in ability. Yet when they recalled the scene of him killing Hei Zhuo, all of them had no choice but to admit that they were not his match.

Just as Nie Yan wanted everyone to introduce themselves so he could get more familiar with each of them, over a hundred players from Holy Empire entered through the arena entrance. They were led by none other than Sleepy Fox who was clad in golden armour.

Holy Empire had arrived!

Nie Yan evaluated the crowd of new arrivals. Even the weakest among them wore equipment that was Level 20 Gold-grade. Impressive... It seems like that guy brought over all the elites of

Holy Empire.

Although this was only an exhibition match between two allies, the smell of gunpowder could still be smelt wafting through the atmosphere. The top hundred players of both guilds were entering the stage, after all.

The guild leaders of Holy Empire and Asskickers United brought over a hundred players to meet in the arena. How could the intentions of both of them not be more obvious?

Nie Yan swept his gaze over his own players, only to see every single one of them rubbing their palms with eager expressions.

The clash between the elites of Holy Empire and Asskickers United was drawing near!

Bladelight walked over to Nie Yan's side, then said in a low voice, "I recognize several familiar faces over on Holy Empire's side. Do you see the two players standing beside Sleepy Fox? The one to the left is a powerful Elementalist called Eternal Phoenix. He belongs to the Holy Empire gaming organization. The one to the right is called Undying Battle Fervor. He's the Chief Fighter of Holy Empire."

Nie Yan heard of them before in the previous timeline. Battle Fervour was the Champion who tanked the Lava Titan for Holy Empire, while Eternal Phoenix was a Magister who ranked among the top three of all Magisters in the game.



Sleepy Fox brought with him numerous other elites along with these two.

“Guild Leader, are we going to fight Holy Empire?”

“Of course we’re going to fight! Why else would we be in the arena?” several other members in the crowd chimed in.

“No, not really a fight,” Nie Yan replied. “More like a friendly exhibition match. But that doesn’t mean you guys should hold back. If everyone performs well, I’ll reward you all when we get back.” If he truly was able to get a 30% stake in the small stronghold, he could obtain enough funds to improve the equipment of these guild members.

“Don’t worry, Boss! We’ll definitely do well!”

The crowd of Asskickers United players was instantly fired up. Almost all of them were fiercely competitive individuals who loved to PvP; how else could they have honed their skills to such an extent? They were more excited about the upcoming match with Holy Empire than the reward Nie Yan promised them for excelling.

Sleepy Fox met eyes with Nie Yan as he walked up to greet him with Battle Fervour and Eternal Phoenix in tow. Not to be outdone, Nie Yan had Bladelight and Young Seven follow closely behind him as well.

“You’ve finally arrived.” Nie Yan revealed a faint smile.

Sleepy Fox nodded in acknowledgement, then scanned the crowd of players behind Nie Yan and judged that their equipment wasn't bad. When his gaze fell on Bladelight who wore the Everlasting Silver Set, he couldn't look away.

“Is that a Metal Storm Set?” Sleepy Fox asked in surprise, mistaking the Everlasting Silver Set as being part of the Metal Storm Series.

From shield, chestplate, helmet, cloak, gauntlet, and so on, every piece of armour on Bladelight's body shared the same design; they were clearly part of a set. The mysterious runes engraved into their surface emitted a strange, stifling aura. With a glance, anyone could tell this gear was extraordinary.

“No, it's the Everlasting Silver Set. So what do you think of our Fighter?” Nie Yan asked with a light smile. At the current stage of the game, where could you find a Fighter stronger than Bladelight?

The Everlasting Silver Set was mediocre at best among Level 40 equipment sets. However, what was so great about this set was that you could equip it at Level 30 as long as you owned the chestplate. If you were to compare all the equipment sets that could be worn at Level 30–35, the Everlasting Silver Set was one of the very best, better than even the Gold Storm Set!

“Everlasting Silver Set?” Sleepy Fox asked with a vacant look. He opened the official website to search for the properties of the Everlasting Silver Set, only to discover it was a Level 40 set which

could be equipped at Level 30. Its properties were absolutely outrageous for players at their level range. “You really never fail to impress. You’re actually able to get a hold of such high-level equipment!”

“I can get you a set for the price of 700 gold. Interested?” Nie Yan joked. The actual cost for him to farm an Everlasting Silver Set was 200–300 gold at most.

“Lower the price by 200 gold, and I’ll be willing to buy. If you can help me secure the stronghold, even paying the full 700 gold isn’t a problem,” Sleepy Fox replied in an earnest tone. Holy Empire didn’t lack gold, so he didn’t mind spending a few hundred to improve Battle Fervour’s gear. With a much beefier main tank, they would be able to challenge even stronger Elites and Lords, ensuring that their profits wouldn’t merely stop at 700 gold!

Sleepy Fox could actually afford such a steep price? Nie Yan suddenly had the idea of allowing Holy Empire to pay for his powerlevelling expenditures! How could he not go through with a deal as sweet as this?

Sleepy Fox looked at Nie Yan and asked, “So do you have another set?”

Nie Yan shrugged his shoulders. “I was only joking. Do you think I can just pull another full set out of nowhere?”

“...” Sleepy Fox was speechless. Nie Yan was just toying with him?

Nie Yan took back the offer right after whetting Sleepy Fox's desire.

Sleepy Fox could clearly tell Nie Yan was holding out for a higher offer. However, he couldn't beg Nie Yan to just sell the Everlasting Silver Set to him, and Holy Empire wasn't really in a position to be spending 700 gold either; he only had about 900 gold available to him. It seemed the matter of buying the Everlasting Silver Set would have to wait until after he seized the stronghold, when the guild's financial stability was secured. Besides, Battle Fervour was only Level 26 right now. He was still a long ways off from Level 30.

"Let's talk about the upcoming stronghold battle." Sleepy Fox changed the subject.

This cunning fox... Nie Yan thought. However, he wasn't worried. When Sleepy Fox wanted to buy the Everlasting Silver Set, he would naturally send a whisper. At that time, they could decide which one of them could endure the longest.

"I'll let my subordinates test out the skills of the players from your guild," Sleepy Fox said. This matter was directly related to the outcome of the stronghold battle. He couldn't be careless.

"Follow me, then," Nie Yan replied.

Everyone walked over to the spectator seating area.

As Sleepy Fox and the other Holy Empire players followed behind, Battle Fervour whispered near his ear, “They have some really strong players.”

“How do you know?” Sleepy Fox asked.

“I’m acquainted with a few of them. You know that Fighter with the Everlasting Silver Set from earlier? His name is Resplendent Bladelight.” Battle Fervour couldn’t help but recall some past events.

“Who’s stronger? You or him?”

“We’re roughly the same in terms of skill. But if we were to truly compare, then I’m probably slightly weaker. With his current level and gear, I’m definitely not his match,” Battle Fervour said with a wry smile.

Sleepy Fox was taken aback. Very few Warriors in Calore were capable of rivalling Battle Fervour. As for those who could make Battle Fervour himself acknowledge his inferiority in skill, there were even fewer; perhaps, the only such person was Resplendent Bladelight.

“You see that girl walking beside Bladelight? She’s called One Strike Vow. She’s a very strong Thief player. I nearly died to her once. I didn’t expect her to join Asskickers United,” Battle Fervour said. As he looked over the crowd ahead, to his amazement, he found there were many more familiar faces.

It appeared Asskickers United was truly the gathering place of the strong!

Suffice to say, Undying Scoundrel, Blowhard Summer Bug, Blue Yarn Thread, Monochrome, Edgeless, and the others who took part in the Kiln Fire Woods operation didn't need introductions.

Just what sort of influence did the guild leader of Asskickers United have to be capable of gathering so many top-notch players?

Would he still have boasted so confidently if he didn't have so many strong players by his side? Sleepy Fox mused. However, he couldn't help but feel unwilling at the thought of having to concede a 30% share of the stronghold. Nevertheless, he would let his subordinates test the players of Asskickers United first.

Standing beside Nie Yan, Bladelight said, "Want me to go up?"

"Of course! If we give them a huge shock, we can sell off the spare Everlasting Silver Set!" Nie Yan laughed. Even at the peak of its price in the previous timeline, the Everlasting Silver Set didn't sell for more than a little over 100 gold. Later on, its price fell down to 40 gold. After all, its drop rate couldn't really be considered low. Many Level 40 players could grind out a full set in five or six days. However, since even the vast majority of the top players in the game were currently below Level 30, there was basically no one capable of levelling in Everlasting City. This was why the Everlasting Silver Set appeared so precious.

Since they could obtain one to two Everlasting Silver Sets after a

day of grinding Mechanical Golems with Basic Magic Bombs, selling off one or two of them was extremely cost efficient. The profit could then be used to fund more powerlevelling trips for other guild members.

Bladelight couldn't help but admire Nie Yan's cunning.

"I can handle seven Holy Empire players by myself. Even ten won't be a problem," Bladelight said in a confident tone. He was already Level 30, while the players on the other side were only around Level 25. Add this to his frightening defense, magic resistance, and health, along with his Rank 6 Shield, even if he stood out in the open and allowed the Mages from Holy Empire to freely hit him, it would still take them at least two minutes to shave away all his health.

"Why not ten then?" Nie Yan chuckled. He had full faith in Bladelight. Beyond that, he had a very devious idea. One versus ten, even if they lost, it wouldn't be considered a humiliation.

"Alright, I'll try my best. It shouldn't be a problem," Bladelight replied. He wasn't the boastful type. He would only say such words if he had a card up his sleeve.

## Chapter 221 – Strength Of The Bull

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Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox headed up to the viewing balcony along with their experts, while the players streamed into the arena below. They would fight however they wished to. An endless string of one-on-one bouts of single combat would end up taking forever, and there was plenty of space available in the open area. It made more sense to have everyone fight in whatever way they deemed appropriate, be it single or group combat.

Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox chatted as they watched the fighting below.

Nie Yan had given Resplendent Bladelight a Level 30 Gold one-handed sword with a life-steal property, one that Tang Yao had just recently obtained while grinding. Although Bladelight's attack power wasn't as overwhelming as his defense or enough for him, it was considered one of the highest in the game. Especially after factoring in the fact that he was four or five levels higher than his opponents, every slash from his sword would end up dealing massive damage. It was a shame that Nie Yan couldn't trade the Chapter of Courage around and lend it to Resplendent Bladelight. With the Chapter of Courage, he'd be able to toy with these players from Holy Empire.

Nie Yan continued his idle conversation with Sleepy Fox for a short time before finally suggesting, "How about we have Resplendent Bladelight spar with your people for a bit?"

An awkward expression flitted across Sleepy Fox's face before he protested, "Nie Yan, are you trying to bully us? Just look at



Bladelight's level! And his equipment! You want my subordinates to line up and die?"

"How about you send out ten players against him?" Nie Yan countered. Bladelight would be hard-pressed in this battle. Nie Yan didn't know if Bladelight could actually defeat ten elites from Holy Empire.

Sleepy Fox started before asking, "You want him to fight in a 10 vs.1 battle?" Is it even possible? In this arena, with such limited space, no player of any class should be able to take out ten other players around their level. This Resplendent Bladelight is only a Level 30 Fighter, not some Level 40 or 50 monstrosity.

"He loses neither equipment nor experience from dying in the arena, so why not?" Nie Yan said as he laughed. Despite his confidence in Bladelight's ability, it wouldn't be proper to brag excessively.

Sleepy Fox stared oddly at Nie Yan for quite some time. After realizing that the other was actually serious about this, he nodded in consent, "Alright."

Sleepy Fox began picking out a few of his subordinates. Eternal Phoenix and Battle Fervor obviously couldn't go up, because sending his best to participate in a 10 vs. 1 fight would be a sign of weakness. Everyone else was roughly on the same skill level, so he casually chose ten of the stronger players at his disposal.

Ten players from Holy Empire, five Berserkers and five Mages,

made their way into the arena after Sleepy Fox called them out. The classes of the players he picked were all solo-focused, deliberately choosing not to put a support class like a Priest into the group. After all, this was the arena! Sending a group of ten players that included a Priest just to deal with a single person was beyond bullying. That would absolutely be a team capable of fighting bosses in the wild! A team composed of five Berserkers and five Mages would be more than enough to make Resplendent Bladelight suffer.

The ten players, on the other hand, thought their leader sent them out to engage in battle with an opposing team, so they began preparing accordingly.

Nie Yan said to Bladelight, “They’re already in place. You should go over too.”

Resplendent Bladelight nodded and started walking. As the Holy Empire players saw him making a move, their hearts all tightened. They were all painfully aware that none of them could beat him in a duel.

Here, in this arena, Bladelight was invincible! He stood tall, towering over the area in a sturdy-looking suit of metallic armor, a gleaming Silver shield on his left arm and a glimmering Gold sword held aloft in his right hand. He radiated an aura of oppressive domination. No one knew who his opponent would be.

“Boss Bladelight went up!”

Several of the players from Asskickers United let out pent-up sighs of longing that couldn't be held back anymore as they watched him. Resplendent Bladelight, in his Everlasting Set, was truly unmatched, and this was only the Everlasting Silver Set. If they could get their hands on, and equip, the Gold set or even the Dark Gold version that would be a dream come true!

Unfortunately, the set Resplendent Bladelight was wearing wasn't completely in its final form. If he could socket a bunch of good gems into the armor, Resplendent Bladelight's stats would significantly increase. Bladelight gallantly threw himself into the arena, bounding over the enclosure and directly opposite to the ten players in the battlegrounds.

Seeing that Bladelight was now looking intently at them, the ten Holy Empire players tensed up. If the first player to enter was this powerful, how could they possibly stand a chance in this team fight? However, even after waiting for a while, no one else looked like they were coming up. The players from Holy Empire couldn't help but look at each other doubtfully.

Sleepy Fox looked at the players he had picked. In line were Ruined Maple, Reflected Crane, Windswept Clouds, and several other players. Although they weren't the top elites of Holy Empire, they were still excellent players.

"You may begin," Sleepy Fox proclaimed. He really did want to see just how strong Resplendent Bladelight was.

Just him alone? The ten Holy Empire elites were stunned. Even if he's ridiculously overpowered, that shouldn't be enough to take on

all ten of us, right?

With a full ten players on one side and only a lone powerhouse on the other, this unbelievable matchup suddenly drew the attention of everyone else. An almost incomprehensible line had just been uttered. Resplendent Bladelight was going to fight one on ten?

“Begin,” Bladelight repeated. His deep voice caused his words to carry a majestic air.

After seeing that Resplendent Bladelight actually intended to fight the ten of them on his own, the Holy Empire players looked at each other and split up, surrounding him from all sides.

“Out of respect for your prowess, we won’t hold back,” warned Reflected Crane. Although it was a stretch for a peak expert like Resplendent Bladelight to take on ten players at once, it wouldn’t be much of a problem for him to take out four or five of them.

“Whatever you have, throw it at me. Let’s start!” Bladelight answered them by raising his sizeable sword.

Charge!

Opening the fight with a Charge, Bladelight blitzed towards one of his opponents. He needed to take out a couple of his opponents as quickly as he could to weaken his opponents from the onset. After all, health potions and other such consumables were unusable in the arena. His opponents could potentially fight him

into a stalemate and slowly chip his health down to zero.

Seeing that Resplendent Bladelight was charging towards him, the Berserker Ruined Maple let out his own battle cry as he also rushed forward.

The other four Berserkers moved around Bladelight, working together to flank him. They moved into a classic combat formation, composed of five Berserkers in a circle of slaughter.

Bladelight himself also understood the ramifications of being surrounded by a circle of Berserkers. Once he was caught in their attacks, he would be headed straight to his death!

Shield Bash!

Resplendent Bladelight roared as he suddenly used another skill. Holding his heavy shield in front of him, he rammed forward like a heavy tank.

Ruined Maple hadn't expected Bladelight to suddenly cancel his Charge and activate Shield Bash. Unfortunately, it was already too late to react. The sturdy shield was about to slam into him. As shields had a blocking property, he knew that his attack wouldn't do anything. Instead, he hastily tried to move his sword into a defensive position. Before he could, however, the shield smashed into his body with a crash. Ruined Maple was sent flying by the enormous force.

The four Berserkers had been late by just a step, but Bladelight had already escaped their encirclement. Instead, he rushed straight for the Mages behind, locking in on an Arcane Mage.

Each of the Mages produced flashes of light as they cast spell after spell. Every single one was a crowd control spell.

Repel!

The Arcane Mage quickly cast a Repel, trying to stop Bladelight's onslaught. With a wave of his staff, he began casting the spell. Unfortunately, Bladelight was able to read the gestures and predict what spell was coming.

Strength of the Bull!

Bladelight's muscles bulged out explosively, and his aura began to rapidly climb. With domineering momentum, he ignored the effects of Repel and rammed into the Arcane Mage. After activating Strength of the Bull, he wouldn't have to fear mind magic, repels, and binds, and the effects of all Elementalist crowd control spells would be greatly reduced.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」A hail of icicles fell from the sky and covered Bladelight in a layer of frost.

Although Bladelight was somewhat slowed, he was still able to rely on his unparalleled strength to break free of the ice with a Charge.

That Arcane Mage didn't expect Bladelight to be able to predict his Repel in advance just from the movement of his staff and counter by activating Strength of the Bull.

Bladelight's charging speed was quite fast. It basically gave him no time to react.

The Arcane Mage raised his feet in preparation to run. He waved his staff and was just about to buff himself with Gale to make a quick retreat.

However, Bladelight let out an angry roar and slashed down on the Arcane Mage with Tendon Break, incapacitating him. A damage value displaying over 300 floated up above the Arcane Mage's head.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Several spells bombarded Bladelight's body. A string of 30s floated up above his head. Some of the spells barely dealt a little over 20 damage.

“Shit! Why are we doing so little damage!?”

These Mages from Holy Empire didn't expect themselves to deal so little damage. Compared to the single slash from Bladelight which dealt over 300 damage, it was practically like the difference between heaven and earth!

Bladelight endured the attacks of the four other Mages, and with

a Divine Strike, he sent the Arcane Mage flying.

The Arcane Mage fell limply to the ground, never to get up again.

“One down!” Bladelight coldly announced. Without pause, he rushed toward another Mage.

A Berserker charged up from behind Bladelight, about to intercept him. In the next moment, it seemed the two were going to collide. However, Bladelight raised the heavy shield in his left hand, then lightly swept out with his left foot.

It was a trip!

The Berserker's leg was hooked, but his body couldn't stop the powerful momentum. Combined with the fact that he had missed his attack, he ended up falling to the ground with a loud crash and slid more than three meters.

After evading the Berserker, Bladelight activated a Charge of his own and rushed toward a nearby Mage.

Everyone was looking on with foolish expressions. Those who could proficiently use the trip action were very few. The trip Bladelight pulled off just a moment ago was practically perfect! Whether in timing or grasp of the opponent's movements, he wasn't lacking in any respect! In a short period of time, he was able to use a simple trip action to temporarily incapacitate the charging Berserker who had caught up to him by making the opponent take



a heavy fall.

The players from Asskickers United below the stage erupted out into cheers and cried out with praise.

“Boss Bladelight is amazing!”

“Too awesome!”

One Strike Vow, who was among the crowd, had her eyes sparkling in splendor.

Even the players from Holy Empire next to them couldn't help but let out sighs of admiration at Bladelight's performance.

Bladelight let out an angry roar. Taking advantage of the remaining duration on Strength of the Bull, he charged up to a Holy Mage. Arriving in front of the opponent, he slashed down with his sword.

With decisive momentum, he weighed down with a pressure that was akin to the weight of Mt. Tai, leaving the Holy Mage unable to resist.

## Chapter 222 – Rank 6 Shield

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It was too late for the Holy Mage to defend. His several crowd control spells were all on cooldown. Even if they were up, they would be rendered useless by the effects of Strength of the Bull, just like the Sheep Transformation he had panic-cast a moment ago.

Bladelight had run high-difficulty dungeons for so long, so how could he not own a single gap closer? He possessed a myriad of skills, far more than even Nie Yan, not to mention many of them were obtained from clearing dungeons on Specialist. At the current stage of the game, he was tyrannical to the extreme, and his Strength far surpassed that of any other Warrior.

When players engaged in PvP, the outcome couldn't be determined by simply comparing the technical abilities of the players. It depended on which side possessed the deeper foundation. For example, imagine a battle between two players at Level 30, where one player got to that level through the hunting of regular mobs, while the other through running countless dungeons on Specialist. Whether in terms of skills, gear, or stats, the former would be far outclassed by the latter. Even if both players were equal in technical ability, the second they crossed blades, the battle would be completely lopsided.

Nearly all the skills at Bladelight's disposal carried the marks of various major dungeons; his Strength of the Bull for example was obtained from clearing Bovine Prairie on Specialist.

Bladelight struck the Holy Mage, then followed up with Flame

Slash, sending the opponent collapsing to the ground. As a Warrior, he could deal serious damage to cloth-armoured opponents like Mages, as long as he could get close to them.

Two of the ten players from Holy Empire fell after barely setting foot into the arena. The eight remaining players couldn't help but suck in a breath of cold air.

The Berserkers charged forward to surround Bladelight.

Shield Bash!

Bladelight slammed his greatshield into the chest of a Berserker, as the tyrannical power sent his opponent staggering back several steps. He activated Nimbleness of the Cheetah, giving himself an explosive burst of speed, then broke out of the encirclement with Sudden Assault.

Bladelight rushed toward a nearby Elementalist.

The Elementalist frantically buffed himself with Ice Armour, then raised his staff, about to cast Immobilize. But he had hardly voiced the first syllable when Bladelight entered his cast range...

Suppressing Roar!

Bladelight's Suppressing Roar struck all the Elementalists, interrupting their spells mid-cast.

Nearly all of Bladelight's skills were activated at pivotal moments in the battle; combined with his valiant defensive capabilities, he gave people a feeling of being untouchable.

As Bladelight closed in on the Elementalist, he activated Tempest Slash, unleashing a wild stream of sword light which pierced the opponent's chest before sending him flying.

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Instant kill!

Bladelight's Tempest Slash was truly domineering without compare. At present, he was akin to an unshakeable deity!

"Three down," Bladelight coolly announced, like a death sentence from King Yama.

Everyone was stunned by how easily the Elementalist died. Bladelight's actions were simply too fast. From the moment he activated Nimbleness of the Cheetah and broke away from the encirclement of Berserkers to instantly killing the Elementalist with Tempest Slash, not more than three seconds had passed. How could anyone retaliate in such a short amount of time!?

Just as Bladelight killed the Elementalist, he spotted another Elementalist from the corner of his eye casting a spell. It was Immobilize!

Before the Elementalist chanted the last incantation syllable, Bladelight activated the Rank 6 Shield.

A brilliant barrier enveloped Bladelight, protecting his body from any and all outside attacks. Just as he was about to turn to face the Berserker who was rushing at him, his body turned stiff. He was struck by Immobilize! For the next five to six seconds, he wouldn't be able to budge even an inch!

“He's been immobilized! Quickly take him out!” shouted the Elementalist. It wasn't easy for him to get off this crowd control spell. They couldn't let this opportunity go to waste!

The Berserkers didn't miss a beat. Charge! They rushed up to Bladelight.

Flame Slash!

Berserk Slash!

A concentrated barrage of attacks landed on Bladelight.「Thud! Thud! Thud!」Muffled sounds rang out as the immobilized Bladelight was continuously pushed back by the powerful strikes, while a shower of spells bombarded his body.

“Shit! We can't break his defenses!” Ruined Maple cursed gloomily.

Tendon Break was useless against heavily armoured targets like Fighters, so the Berserkers could only rely on regular attacks.

Bladelight's defenses were akin to an impregnable fortress. When layered on top of his formidable physical defense and magic resistance, the Rank 6 Shield was able to absorb a great amount of damage. For a moment, the players from Holy Empire had no choice but to watch on helplessly as their attacks barely did anything to him. They could only slowly chip away at his health.

Even though Bladelight's health quickly fell below 80% under the concentrated onslaught of attacks, this wasn't nearly enough to satisfy the players from Holy Empire. They were with seven after all, each of them throwing everything they had at the immobilized Bladelight. Yet they barely shaved off 20% of his health, how was this possible!?

At this moment, Sleepy Fox, who was watching the battle from the spectator stands, couldn't help but stand up with an excited expression. He knew better than anyone just what a Fighter with high defense signified. It meant an unending flood of good equipment. In a short period of a time, the equipment of almost all of the guild's elites would be raised by a tier.

"That shield is a set bonus from the Everlasting Silver Set?" Sleepy Fox asked. The effects of this shield were simply too amazing. It seemed he had still underestimated the properties of this equipment set.

Nie Yan also didn't expect the Rank 6 Shield to be so formidable. Its persistent effects were impressive as well. "Yes, it's the set

bonus of the Everlasting Silver Set.”

“Sell me an Everlasting Silver Set. I’ll pay the 700 gold,” Sleepy Fox said in an earnest tone. At the current stage of the game, the value of the Everlasting Silver Set definitely exceeded 700 gold! If Radiant Sacred Flame or Victorious Return knew they could use 700 gold to obtain such a set, they would definitely pounce on the opportunity without the slightest hesitation. Of course, Nie Yan would never sell to them.

Bladelight was already ample proof of the Everlasting Silver Set’s worth.

“I don’t have another complete set at the moment, “ Nie Yan replied. Even if Sleepy Fox was more patient, he still couldn’t gather a second set so soon. He understood that selling the Everlasting Silver Set to Holy Empire was worth it. If Holy Empire was at a disadvantageous position when they crossed swords with Radiant Sacred Flame and ended up defeated, then Asskickers United would bear the brunt of the combined power of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. By selling the Everlasting Silver Set to Holy Empire, he would be increasing their strength.

“It doesn’t matter if it takes a little while. As long as you can get me the set by the time Battle Fervour reaches Level 30, it’ll be fine,” Sleepy Fox said. Although 700 gold was a considerable sum, enough to severely hurt his wallet, when compared to the formidable defensive capabilities of the Everlasting Silver Set, it was still worth every coin. At worst, when Battle Fervour got to Level 30, they would have to hunt a few more Lords to earn back their expenses.

“Well, if you really want it. Give me a down payment of 300 gold first.” Nie Yan was unrelenting. If he could get 300 gold from Sleepy Fox, he would have even more money for the upcoming virtual property auction.

“You’re even going to bicker with me about this...?” Sleepy Fox asked in a dejected tone. Nie Yan was really too much of a miser!

“Even sworn brothers must cleanly settle their accounts. Do you want it or not? If you don’t hand over a down payment, then when the time comes, I don’t know if I’ll have an Everlasting Silver Set to sell to you. Aside from Bladelight, my guild has other Fighters that would want such a set,” Nie Yan said in an indifferent tone. He didn’t think Sleepy Fox was truly a Mr. Moneybags, even willing to hand over 700 gold. If he had known earlier, he would’ve raised the price a little higher. However, he couldn’t completely empty Sleepy Fox’s pockets. After all, they were still allies.

“Fine, let’s sign an agreement... you know, to avoid you robbing me of 300 gold,” Sleepy Fox relented. He gave Nie Yan an agreement to sign.

“If I can’t deliver an Everlasting Silver Set after five days, I’ll have to pay an additional penalty fee of 200 gold. You really are too sinister!” Nie Yan said after looking at the agreement. In other words, if he didn’t give the Everlasting Silver Set to Sleepy Fox, he would basically have to hand over 500 gold!



“We’ll both be in the same boat.” Sleepy Fox let out a sinister laugh.

Nie Yan pondered for a moment. As long as he had the money, endlessly farming the Mechanical Golems with Basic Magic Bombs to gather an Everlasting Silver Set was very doable. After all, the drop rate of the set pieces was relatively high, not to mention they had already gathered a bunch of spare pieces. He signed the agreement without further hesitation. If there was money to be earned, he would be a fool not to take advantage of the opportunity.

At this moment, a new development occurred on the arena stage.

Bladelight regained control of his body by the time his health dropped down by about 40%.

Bladelight originally believed that after being struck by Immobilize, his health would fall by at least 60% when he regained control. Like this, he would still have a chance to make a comeback. He didn’t expect that after he regained control of his body, his health only fell by 37%. He was now even more confident in beating the remaining seven to win this battle.

Blind!

An Arcane Mage cast Blind on Bladelight, causing his vision to go dark.

However, with so much health remaining, what was there for Bladelight to fear!?

Although Bladelight was blinded, he could still sense the Berserkers beside him from their attacks. With a Whirlwind Slash, a string of damage values displaying over two hundred floated up above their heads.

It was the lifesteal property!

Bladelight instantly regained 5% of his health!

The surrounding Berserkers were dumbfounded. They had put in painstaking effort to shave away a bit of Bladelight's health, only to have him regain a huge chunk of it with only one attack! Was he trying to drive them into bashing their heads into a wall and committing suicide!?

Suppressing Roar!

Knockback!

The Berserkers went ballistic. They frantically attacked Bladelight, slowly pushing him back. The powerful impact of their attacks nearly knocked him off balance.

Bladelight let out a ferocious roar. With a wide-arcing slash, he sent a Berserker flying outwards, then activated another Whirlwind Slash.

Punishing Blow!

Bladelight's sword slash sent yet another Berserker flying.

Despite being blinded, Bladelight's attacks were exceptionally accurate. After all, these Berserkers were all moving within melee distance of him, he could easily determine their positions.

「Bang! Bang!」Two Flame Bursts struck Bladelight and fiercely exploded on his body. The devastating power of the Flame Bursts pushed him back several steps.

However, although the two Flame Bursts had a huge visual impact, they only dealt a little over 30 damage each to Bladelight! It was barely a scratch!

Bladelight recovered his vision. Of the five Berserkers, four were on low health!

## Chapter 223 – Complete Victory!

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“It appears that I’ve underestimated my own defensive capabilities and the Rank 6 Shield,” Bladelight mused after glancing through his character information. It felt invigorating to have such formidable defense! He was practically a raid boss!

The Rank 6 Shield was teetering on the verge of collapse after bearing the brunt of the attacks of the players from Holy Empire for so long. It looked like it was moments away from shattering into pieces, but the outcome of this battle was already written in stone.

Bladelight was indomitable beyond compare! He stood unscathed, like an iron tower, despite the barrage of attacks he received. Seeing he still had over 60% of his health left, the several players still alive on the stage felt a profound sense of powerlessness rising up in their hearts. Dammit! This Fighter is way too tanky, isn’t he!?

「Bang! Bang!」Two Fireballs blasted Bladelight, sending a shower of embers flying everywhere. The Rank 6 Shield collapsed, shattering into countless fragments that dissolved into the air.

“His shield broke!” Ruined Maple exclaimed, believing they still had a chance at victory.

Although the three other Berserkers understood Ruined Maple’s excitement, they glanced at their remaining health which ranged between 300 to 400 points each. Even if they surrounded

Bladelight, two hits from his Whirlwind Slash would finish them off with ease.

Bladelight's damage was simply too ferocious. In contrast, the damage they dealt him was simply too pitiful. Even without the Rank 6 Shield, they could only deal 30 to 40 damage to him with each attack.

Being fully aware of this fact, who among the four of them still dared to approach Bladelight?

Bladelight took advantage of this moment of hesitation to chase down the last two remaining Mages. The Elementalist made a futile attempt at casting Repel, only for Bladelight to cut him down with two skills. The Arcane Mage also failed to escape his grasp. Bladelight incapacitated him with Tendon Break, then sent him flying with Flame Slash.

At last, Bladelight turned to the four remaining Berserkers. After a brief stare-down, they summoned up the courage to charge at him.

They activated all their skills while fiercely lunging at Bladelight.

Cleave!

Thunderous Blow!

Sword-light from the barrage of attacks flew all over the arena.

The Berserkers, in an effort to pull themselves out of the perilous situation they found themselves in, ruthlessly hacked at Bladelight and forced him back step by step.

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A string of damage values floated up above Bladelight's head as his health dropped at the speed of molasses.

Under the frantic attacks, every step Bladelight retreated was stable. His movements didn't show the slightest trace of panic. With his formidable defense, he could disregard their attacks entirely.

Seizing an opening, Bladelight brandished his sword.

Whirlwind Slash!

Bladelight's sword whirled through all four berserkers as damage values displaying over 200 floated up above their heads, leaving them with only a sliver of health away from death.

Bladelight activated Shield Bash and sent a Berserker flying. The berserker's health dropped to zero mid-air, and by the time he fell on the ground, he was long dead.

Flame Slash!

Bladelight cut down another Berserker.

Of the initial ten, only two were left standing!

Frenzy Slash!

The sword aura emanating from Bladelight's blade resembled a violent storm as he stabbed out at the two Berserkers in front of him, blasting them away.

With a little over half his health left, he stood tall over the corpses which littered the arena stage, evidence of the bitter struggle that occurred just moments ago.

A lot easier than I thought, Bladelight mused. He didn't expect the Rank 6 Shield to absorb so much damage. What surprised him the most was that he still had 52% health remaining! Didn't that mean he could've still taken on a few more opponents? This battle was a complete one-sided slaughter!

He had relied on his superior equipment and level to suppress them, but relying on such an advantage to slaughter players like chopping vegetables really did feel great!

Warriors were the most gear-reliant out of all the classes. No matter how skilled of a Warrior a player was, if their equipment was garbage, they were nothing but dregs. That being said, the equipment on a Warrior generally reflected the strength of the player. A good Warrior could absolutely rely on their skills to improve their gear quality.

The battle was over, and the audience was dumbstruck by Bladelight's performance. What shocked them the most was that Bladelight still had over half his health remaining. This was astonishing! To win a 1 vs. 10 so easily, he was probably the only person who could pull off such a feat.

Bladelight's defeat of the ten players from Holy Empire was further validation of the Everlasting Silver Set's formidable properties. This ignited Sleepy Fox's desire of obtaining this set more than ever. If he had a few more Fighters on Bladelight's level, then the upcoming battle for the stronghold would be a cinch; Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return would have no choice but to step aside!

Sleepy Fox took a deep breath to calm down the shock in his heart. He finally said in a calm tone, "Let's see your other players."

Nie Yan shot a glance at Sleepy Fox. Don't try and hide it from me. I know you're not as calm as you're pretending to be.

When Bladelight jumped off the arena stage, One Strike Vow walked up to meet him.



“Wow, nice equipment. Where did you get it?” One Strike Vow asked with a brilliant smile which left several of the surrounding players dazed.

Even Bladelight wasn’t immune to her charms. Rubbing his nose to hide his embarrassment, he said, “You’ll need to ask Nirvana Flame.”

At this moment, the ten Holy Empire players on the stage resurrected. Every one of them had bitter smiles.

Bladelight chatted with One Strike Vow for a while before walking up the spectator stands.

“You worked hard.” Nie Yan nodded to Bladelight.

Bladelight laughed, then sent a whisper,「It was a piece of cake.」

「If you say that out loud, you’ll enrage Sleepy Fox half to death.」 Nie Yan chuckled. Killing a Fighter such as Bladelight required a special method. Many powerful crowd control spells were a must. He’d have to be locked down with crowd control while everyone bombarded him with attacks. It might require the participation of players, of classes such as the Shadow Priest or Paladin, who could do well in PvP and also heal.

In this battle, aside from showing off the might of his equipment, Bladelight displayed his formidable judgement. He had taken out a

few of the Mages first so as to alleviate the pressure on him while he fought the Berserkers.

Even if it was Nie Yan, he could do nothing more than battle Bladelight to a draw. Bladelight's defense was too solid. Taking him out would be no easy task. If a Thief met a Fighter such as Bladelight in the wilderness and still insisted on ambushing him, it was the perfect example of an idiot. The sensible thing to do was to just ignore each other and go their separate ways.

「What about the other matches?」Sleepy Fox asked Eternal Phoenix beside him.

Eternal Phoenix looked at the statistics and said,「There were over 70 matches in total. Most of our skilled players have fought.」

「And the results?」Sleepy Fox asked.

These conversations could only be done in chat. He certainly didn't want Nie Yan hearing him.

「We've won 10 matches and lost over 60,」Eternal Phoenix said with a wry smile.

「Why is it so low?」Sleepy Fox knitted his brows and asked in a grave tone. It must be understood that the players he brought with him today were the best Holy Empire had to offer!

「I don't know... These guys are too strong!」Eternal Phoenix

sighed. He didn't know where this group of such powerful players popped up. He couldn't help but praise them. Asskickers United was deserving of its name. It was full of asskickers!「Those players who appeared in Kiln Fire Woods still haven't fought. Aside from them, One Strike Vow and a few others haven't gone up either. Everyone on their side that has fought so far have no prior achievements that would've made them noteworthy.」

Sleepy Fox glanced at Nie Yan with a complicated expression. In a clash against Asskickers United's elites, Holy Empire had suffered a complete and utter defeat! He somewhat envied Asskickers United. With such a powerful bunch of players, why worry about any major events? It was no wonder Victorious Return viewed them as their greatest rival!

Sleepy Fox thought of Asskickers United's mysterious background. After considering the matter over and over again, he decided that no matter what happened later on, he would avoid becoming enemies with them at all costs. He felt such a thing was far more terrifying than offending both Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

It appeared that Holy Empire was far from being strong enough. Only by working on their own strength could they weather through future storms.

Eternal Phoenix, Undying Battle Fervour, and a few of the other best players still hadn't acted. But even if they acted now, it would be meaningless.

Nie Yan was enjoying the battles. After a Berserker from Holy

Empire defeated two Asskickers United players in a row, a Holy Mage from Asskickers United got up on the stage.

The Holy Mage's face was vaguely familiar. Nie Yan felt he had seen it somewhere before in his past life.

"Who is he?" Nie Yan asked Young Seven standing beside him. He was more familiar with the other top players in the guild.

"His name is Fond of the Sunny South. He's a strong Holy Mage, ranks in at least the top 20 of the guild," Young Seven replied. He wasn't too familiar with this person, but Sunny South's skills still left somewhat of a deep impression on him, which was why he gave such an evaluation.

In a guild like Asskickers United where talented players were numerous, ranking in the top 20 was an amazing feat!

Fond of the Sunny South... Nie Yan couldn't help but feel a little emotional. Sunny South was one of the players he had asked Guo Huai to scout. Later on, he didn't know what the outcome of the recruitment was, nor did he bother to ask. In his past life, he had dueled Sunny South and suffered a crushing defeat. Just like him, Sunny South was also a step away from receiving the ultimate title for his class. The difference, however, was that while he had given up, Sunny South continued to diligently attack that final barrier. Later on, he heard Sunny South was successful in becoming a Sage, but the information wasn't too reliable.

In the previous timeline, Sunny South was one of the few players

who refused to join a team. He was a Mage who relied only on himself and slaughtered his way to the peak. According to rumours, he was a former member of Radiant Sacred Flame. But because the guild leader angered him, he cursed up a storm in the guild chat, and as a consequence, he was booted from the guild. From then on, he never joined any other guild. He even flatly turned down the generous offers of Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine

He dared to curse the guild leader in the guild chat. This guy has quite a reckless personality. Nie Yan's mouth curved into a faint smile. If a guild member cursed me out, how would I react? He briefly pondered over the question before shaking his head. He'd probably deal with the person in a calm manner. If they made good points, he wouldn't hesitate to admit his faults. After dying once, such matters had long since become trivial to him.

On the arena stage, Sunny South bombarded the Berserker with spell after spell, then activated Repel, temporarily holding the opponent at bay. After Repel wore off and the Berserker closed in, he cast Sheep Transformation, turning him into a sheep, and sped back several meters. Following several more exchanges, he concluded the match by blasting the Berserker to death.

"He's strong. He'd have no problem entering the top 15 of the guild," Nie Yan said. The guild leader of Radiant Sacred Flame must've bashed his head on a door to expel such a powerful player from the guild. But in this timeline, Sunny South was a member of Asskickers United.

## Chapter 224 – Upcoming Storm

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Even Nie Yan was surprised at the veritable sea of talents within Asskickers United. The names that he could remember from the previous timeline probably numbered around six or seven hundred. Since most of those players had not been recruited into major organizations yet, Nie Yan had Guo Huai send out invitations to them. After seeing the generous terms offered by Asskickers United, these players were one by one lured into the guild. This situation was the source of their complete victory.

Guo Huai thought these were all people who Nie Yan had interacted with before deciding to have him to recruit them. He hadn't expected so many of them to be so talented. He could only sigh at Nie Yan's amazing vision. He had no way of knowing about Nie Yan's reincarnation. Of course, there were also those who seemed rather mediocre. Guo Huai suggested kicking these people out, but Nie Yan decided to allow them to stay.

Most of the talented players right now had played virtual reality games before to some degree. After starting Conviction, they showed high levels of skill right from the onset. Undying Scoundrel, Blowhard Summer Bug, and many of the other skilled elites were in this camp. Then there was another set of players, late bloomers, who only showed extreme talent in later stages of the game. For now, players like the Fighter Aristocratic Shadow, the beautiful Priestess Twinkling Snowfall, and many like them had not shown anything spectacular in the guild. Later on in the game, they would prove themselves to be capable players, rising up and bursting out with terrifying ferocity. For the time being, they were still learning more about the game one step at a time. Aware of the situation, it was only natural that Nie Yan did not dismiss them and instead provided them with excellent conditions to grow

in. If they developed into powerhouses in the future, he would've made an amazing profit. If not, then at least he deprived a rival guild of a potential elite. Guo Huai would never be able to understand Nie Yan's train of thought.

In the battles against each other, Asskickers United achieved many more victories than Holy Empire. Sleepy Fox eventually came to realize that Nie Yan's words from earlier were not spoken in vain. If these players assisted in the upcoming battle for the Stronghold, they could take out at least five or six hundred players from Radiant Sacred Flame, if not many more. If that occurred, then Holy Empire would come out on top and win the battle for the Stronghold.

After thinking about it for a while, Sleepy Fox realized that giving up 30% of the stronghold's profits in exchange for a much greater chance of winning the other 70% was a worthwhile tradeoff. After all, if they lost the entire stronghold to Radiant Sacred Flame, they would have nothing at all.

"Let's sign the contract then!" Sleepy Fox decided, clenching his teeth.

Nie Yan smirked at this. If we win, we'd get a share in a stronghold's profits even though we're not a Level 5 guild. What could be better?

The two of them signed the contract, which went into effect and was enforced by the game's system.

“I don’t think it’s necessary to let them continue with these battles any longer,” Nie Yan said, glancing at the guild members fighting below. It was clear that the players from Holy Empire were beaten, and unable to endure any longer. In all the battles that had occurred until now, the losses far outweighed their handful of victories.

Sleepy Fox was slightly embarrassed as he replied, “I think it’s best if we stop now.”

Nie Yan commanded all of the players from Asskickers United to end their battles and withdraw from the arena.

Since Sleepy Fox had agreed to purchase the Everlasting Silver Set, he felt there was no harm in continuing to bring guild members to Everlasting City to level. By allowing his guild members to gain a few more levels right before the battle for the Stronghold, they would have a better chance of victory. Nie Yan’s gaze fell on Resplendent Bladelight. He intended to fully socket every piece of Bladelight’s Everlasting Silver Set with Evasion Gems. After that, he was going to add a couple of Stat Amplification Gems to the Level 30 Gold one-handed sword. If he managed to find a powerful Enchanter, his plan for Bladelight would become that much better.

In addition to this, Nie Yan planned on raising Bladelight several levels higher. Once the battle for the Stronghold erupted and Resplendent Bladelight led the charge with his formidable defense, was there an enemy that could endure?

Powerful Fighters and Berserkers belonged in the heart of the



battlefield, where the innate advantages of their class shined. Their role was to charge and break through the enemy line.

There was also Yi Yan to consider. He could have Yi Yan wear the Everlasting Silver Set before it was handed over to Holy Empire, if he managed to raise Yi Yan to level 30.

Nie Yan had an important task to complete before the battle for the Stronghold started, and that was to obtain the Chapter of Virtue. Once this was done, he wouldn't be anxious about someone else obtaining it during the battle for the Stronghold.

Once the six Chapters were combined into the First Volume of the Book of Order, he had no idea what the properties would be for this Legendary item. No one in the previous timeline collected all of the Chapters, so Nie Yan couldn't help but anticipate getting his hands on the treasured First Volume of the Book of Order. In this lifetime, Nie Yan put blood, sweat, and tears to finally seize five Chapters from the Book of Order. Now the final chapter was within his sights, off in the distant horizon.

Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox were chatting and planning out their next move, when suddenly, a series of notices started popping up in the guild window.

Aqua Smoke Stub has left the guild!

Cold Peak Absolute Blade has left the guild!

Wood Grace has left the guild!

Samsara Lord has left the guild!

...

Nie Yan's face turned dark. It's all players from the Withered Leaf gaming organization! Have they decided to renege on our contract with them? Do they not have any fear of us seeking reparations from them?

This was the first group ever to betray Asskickers United. If Nie Yan found out that they had sided with some other guild, he would definitely make them pay a heavy price! This matter concerned the dignity of Asskickers United, after all. With just the clauses from the contract, he could already make them suffer a severe consequence.

Puzzled by Nie Yan's gloomy expression, Sleepy Fox asked, "What's happened?"

Nie Yan said calmly, "Some things have happened within the guild. One moment please."

Sleepy Fox nodded. He could somewhat guess what had happened within Asskickers United.

「Guo Huai, what's going on?」Nie Yan messaged.

Guo Huai could feel the angry undercurrents in Nie Yan's question, like thunder rumbling before a storm.「It's very complicated. I'm still trying to pacify the rest of the guild right now. Withered Leaf's withdrawal has a reason behind it. Don't worry about it. I'll tell you the whole story later.」He was evidently exhausted from trying to deal with the guild.

Nie Yan looked at the guild chat and was puzzled by what he saw. It was filled with members voicing their fervent support for Withered Leaf and Aqua Smoke Stub.

“Executive Guild Leader, we can't ignore Withered Leaf's plight! They're our brothers too!”

“Yeah! Withered Leaf is full of our good brothers! They've brought us levelling with them so many times! People cannot repay kindness with evil. Even if I lose my equipment and drop a bunch of levels, we can't stay out of this!

“Executive Guild Leader, you have to talk to the boss!”

Guo Huai posted in the guild chat, “Everyone, please, calm down. We're still looking into what exactly happened. Don't do anything rash! The guild will definitely not just let this matter go. I'm going to talk with Nirvana Flame. He will have the final say. Before then, anyone who quits the guild shouldn't even think about coming back!”

Left with no other options, Guo Huai dropped the twin bombs of

Nie Yan's name and banishment from the guild. Only then did the guild members calm down enough to stop spamming the guild chat and wait for Nie Yan's verdict.

「Guo Huai, tell me, what actually happened?」Nie Yan whispered. He still wasn't sure about what was actually going on.

Guo Huai was already soaked with sweat. The mobbing guild members were really too hard to deal with.

「It's like this: Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky had a conflict as a result of a previous grudge. Since they're both major gaming organizations, they're naturally rival competitors. This time, Azure Falling Sky killed a group of over fifty Withered Leaf players outside of Bovine Prairie, infuriating Aqua Smoke Stub. As you know, because the Azure Falling Sky guild was established by their parent gaming organization, they started off with over twenty thousand players. That could already be considered a formidable force in the game. Since Withered Leaf was temporarily part of Asskickers United, their status was rather sensitive. Aqua Smoke Stub was worried that if they got into a conflict with Azure Falling Sky, that would drag us into the mess and provoke an enemy we didn't want. Part of their modus operandi is to not create any inconveniences for their customers, so Aqua Smoke Stub asked me to pass on a message to you. He said that this is Withered Leaf's conflict and has nothing to do with Asskickers United. He also promised to pay us back for any losses that this event might cause. After this battle, they will rejoin our guild and continue the previous agreement. Before I had a chance to say anything, he'd already left the guild. I hear he's already brought his people to attack Azure Falling Sky,」Guo Huai explained in a single breath. He was fully aware of how difficult it would be to resolve this

matter, especially with the guild members' attitudes. At Nie Yan's request, Withered Leaf had often brought Asskickers United players with them on levelling parties. The guild members were more than a little grateful for their generosity. With Withered Leaf headed off to battle against Azure Falling Sky, many of them were so frenzied that they'd been spamming about leaving the guild instead of staying out of the fight.

Having explained the situation, Guo Huai asked,「So what do we do?」

「What else do we do? Gather the people! We're going to eliminate Azure Falling Sky.」After hearing the entire story, Nie Yan didn't hesitate at all.

Guo Huai was startled by Nie Yan's lightning-fast reply. He hadn't expected Nie Yan to come to a conclusion so quickly.「Azure Falling Sky has been neutral this whole time. With over twenty thousand players in their ranks, they count amongst the strongest of the second-tier guilds. Azure Falling Sky is one of the top gaming organizations in the country, and is in no way inferior to Withered Leaf. It might even be stronger than Withered Leaf! Do you think it's really worth it for us to become enemies with such a powerful organization just for a single Withered Leaf?」

As the leaders of the guild, they had no choice but to consider things from the guild's perspective and make cost-benefit analyses. If Asskickers United meddled in the fight between Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky, that would be the same as pushing the latter into the enemy camp.

Withered Leaf withdrew from the guild, thereby severing the relationship of both parties, so Asskickers United wouldn't have to get embroiled in this matter. This was part of their ethics as professionals.

「This isn't about whether it's worth it or not. Before Withered Leaf joined Asskickers United, they could've been beaten like dogs by Azure Falling Sky, and I wouldn't have batted an eyelid. But after Withered Leaf joined us, even if it was just a temporary contractual relationship, they became sworn brothers of our guild. They were attacked while part of our guild. Anyone who attacks the members of our Asskickers United, be it Azure Falling Sky, Radiant Sacred Flame, Victorious Return, or even our allies like Holy Empire, Sapphire Shrine, or Battle Crazy Alliance, we'll retaliate in full force! Make no mistake! 」Nie Yan's said in an unyielding tone.

## Chapter 225 – Soaring Murderous Aura

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Nie Yan normally didn't have such a bad temper since it would negatively affect the way he dealt with affairs. But when something crossed his bottom line, he wasn't willing to concede even a single step! And that was the people on his side should not be bullied! No exceptions!

「Tell the guild members to show their spirit! Show their might! If Azure Falling Sky kills ten of our own, then we'll kill a hundred of them! If they kill a hundred of our own, we'll massacre their entire guild!」Nie Yan declared as he brimmed with killing intent. He felt it was only proper for the people under him to show the guts of a bandit as well as a willingness to shed some blood. If they cowered at the smallest matters like a flock of timid sheep, then when trouble occurred for the guild or the guild leader, they would be the first to flee as soon as there were signs of something going wrong.

Not only that, but all the guild members were waiting on the answer of the executives. If Nie Yan abandoned Withered Leaf, leaving them to their fate, then who knows many players would decide to withdraw from the guild? Such a scenario would deal a huge blow to the morale of Asskickers United!

The executives of the guild could not cower back in fear!

Nie Yan had to show that the guild was willing to stick its neck out for its own; how else could he expect the guild members to give it their all in a time of crisis?

What was important? What was unimportant? It was a very easy choice to make.

So what if they offended Azure Falling Sky? By doing so, they could obtain the unwavering loyalty of Withered Leaf! It was definitely worth the trade-off!

「Although reason tells me that you're being way too reckless, and that we can find a better way to settle this matter, I still fully support your decision. I'll immediately start assembling our forces!」Guo Huai said before passing on Nie Yan's words to the rest of the guild.

「Whoever attacks the members of our Asskickers United, no matter which guild, be it Azure Falling Sky, Radiant Sacred Flame, Victorious Return, or even our allies like Holy Empire, Sapphire Shrine, or Battle Crazy Alliance, we'll retaliate in full force! Make no mistake! Show your spirit! Show your might! If Azure Falling Sky kills ten of our own, then we'll kill a hundred of them. If they kill a hundred of our own, then we'll massacre their entire guild!」

Nie Yan's declaration immediately fired up the guild members. As though a single stone created a thousand waves, they erupted out into thunderous cheers. With a guild leader like this, even if they were killed back to Level 0, it would still be worth! No matter what the future had in store for them, even if it was outside the game, they could puff out their chests with their heads held high and tell everyone, "I belong to Asskickers United!"

「Long live the guild leader!」



「Screw those bastards! Let's slaughter Azure Falling Sky!」

The guild chat exploded with a sense of camaraderie as morale grew to an all-time high. The guild members showed an unprecedented amount support for Nie Yan!

Guo Huai didn't expect Nie Yan's words to give rise to such a big reaction. He sensed the surging emotions of all the guild members. At this moment, these players were truly a part of the guild! Their hearts were completely swayed. From now on, they would share both the honour and the disgrace of Asskickers United!

Guo Huai clearly sensed the difference between before and after! He pondered over a question for a long time. Just what was he lacking compared to Nie Yan? And now he finally figured it out! It was precisely that unyielding attitude! Maybe only Nie Yan could be considered a genuine leader, since he was able to raise the morale of the entire guild!

If you were to liken Asskickers United to an army, then this army now had a mighty general to make up its soul!

As long as Nie Yan gave the word, these guild brothers would move mountains and create new seas! Wherever they pointed their spears, everything blocking their path would be swept clean!

They were linked together through the guild. They addressed each other as brother. They were all players of Asskickers United, and they grew even closer.

In this moment, Guo Huai felt that Nie Yan's decision was correct! He started assembling the players under him and issuing out orders at a speed never seen before.

「Where are Aqua Smoke Stub and the rest of Withered Leaf right now?」Nie Yan asked. He needed to control the movements of Withered Leaf.

「They're at Twilight Forest. Azure Falling Sky's forces are there too. They've already killed over a hundred players from Azure Falling Sky. Both sides are still in the middle of a brawl. Almost 9,000 enemy players were spotted moving in their direction. I assume they want to wipe out Withered Leaf in one fell swoop,」Guo Huai informed. Azure Falling Sky had reacted faster than he imagined.

Nie Yan knitted his brows. Smoke Stub was probably being held up. He wasn't foolish enough to wait for enemy reinforcements to arrive. If they were completely surrounded by Azure Falling Sky's forces, they would no longer have the chance to escape!

「I'll lead some people to Twilight Forest first. Gather up our forces as quickly as possible,」Nie Yan decided. Saving people was akin to putting out a fire. If they were late by even a single step, it would deal a huge blow to the morale of the rescuers.

All the Asskickers United players in the arena below gathered around Nie Yan in the spectator stands.

“Boss, what are we going to do?”

“Boss, let’s slaughter a path there!”

The players voiced their opinions one after another. All of them had been paying attention to the guild chat, so they knew what was going on. They too were impassioned by the sense of camaraderie.

Sleepy Fox evidently knew what had occurred in Asskickers United. He stared at Nie Yan with a complicated expression. Although large guilds like Holy Empire, Victorious Return, and Radiant Sacred Flame were enormous enough to inspire fear among the playerbase, how many of them possessed so many loyal players? How many of their members were just there to scrounge up some benefits, running away as soon as the going gets tough? These sorts of players comprised at least 90% of the large guilds!

Such circumstances weren’t at all rare for large guilds; you could even say they were extremely common. While with Asskickers United, to say the unity of their players was shocking would be an understatement. Nie Yan’s previous words suddenly had a profound impact on Sleepy Fox. Even down the road, Asskickers United won’t surpass 100,000 members!

If you equipped 100,000 players with the best gear, then you could move trek through the whole world unhindered!

There was a very appropriate saying, “A flock of sheep led by a lion can defeat a pride of lions led by a sheep!”

Only an unyielding general like Nie Yan could lead an army of invincible soldiers with heroic spirits that soared through the clouds!

“Do you want my help?” Sleepy Fox asked. Asskickers United and Holy Empire were already bound to the same ship. If one of them sank, so would the other.

“Yeah. If you can help me monitor the movements of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, it would be appreciated,” Nie Yan replied. He needed to guard against them taking advantage of the opportunity to come into play.

“No problem. You can leave it to me.” Sleepy Fox nodded.

Nie Yan’s eyes swept over the crowd of Asskickers United players. “Those of you who aren’t spineless cowards, follow me to Twilight Forest! We’re going to massacre Azure Falling Sky!”

“Massacre Azure Falling Sky!” the crowd roared together, their thundering voices ringing out across the entire arena.

This was only the thunder before the storm! This was their declaration of war on Azure Falling Sky!

The players from Holy Empire were flabbergasted by the sheer fighting spirit that erupted from Asskickers United, especially from Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, Blue Yarn Thread, and the others. They returned to the time when they were the very

embodiment of the spirit of vengeance, when the nine of them followed Nie Yan out of the guild headquarters and painted the Kiln Fire Woods with the blood of every player in Unhindered. It was precisely during that battle that they proved the mettle of Asskickers United, and defeated both Unhindered and Victorious Return. They went through blood and fire together in that battle, watching each other's backs, and sharing in the trials and tribulations.

A true sense of camaraderie that was forged through the heat of the battlefield!

Undying Scoundrel choked up as he stared at Nie Yan's back, emotion overcoming him as he thought about Nie Yan's declaration in the guild chat.

Over a hundred players from Asskickers United followed behind Nie Yan as he headed for the transfer area.

"Boss, what's going on with them?" a Holy Empire player asked Sleepy Fox.

"There's a bit of trouble over on their side. When Holy Empire goes through a crisis, I'll be satisfied if you guys can even have half as much fighting spirit as them," Sleepy Fox replied with a thoughtful expression. After thinking for a while, he decided that he also ought to find out for himself what allowed Nie Yan to receive such unwavering support from his guild members. Was it simply because of the name of the Mad Rogue? No, absolutely not!

“There’s some movement over on the side of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. What do we do?” Eternal Phoenix asked. He had just received a report from their spies.

Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return planted moles in Asskickers United. After becoming aware that Asskickers United was planning to go to war with Azure Falling Sky, they immediately started gathering their troops. With such a perfect opportunity in front of them, they absolutely wouldn’t let go of it easily.

“Mobilize all players in Holy Empire Level 20 or higher. We’re going to play with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame for a while!” Sleepy Fox’s eyes flashed with a cold light. If Holy Empire’s mettle wasn’t as formidable as Asskickers United’s, then from today onwards, that would slowly begin to change!

Eternal Phoenix discovered that Sleepy Fox had suddenly gone through a drastic change. After a long time, he earnestly nodded his head. “I’ll immediately start convening our brothers!”

Holy Empire was like a giant machine as it rapidly went into full gear.

Nie Yan and over a hundred players teleported to Link Town, then set out to Twilight Forest with their fastest speed. No one knew what the situation was like over on Smoke Stub’s side, or how much longer he could hold on for. However, the strength of Withered Leaf wasn’t to be underestimated. It wouldn’t be so simple for Azure Falling Sky to wipe them out in a short amount of time.

Countless Asskickers United players assembled from all directions to Link Town. From several thousand to tens of thousands, they were all led by Tang Yao. After withdrawing the Energized Crystal Fragments from the treasury, he had already resurrected his Arcane Fairy. Right now, he was even more full of spirit. He was hollering that they would massacre Azure Falling Sky until not even a single piece of the enemy's equipment remained

Numerous groups of Asskickers United players clad in high-quality equipment emerged in Link Town. Afterwards, they assembled outside of the town, causing the bystanders to feel the tense atmosphere of an approaching war.

“What’s going on?”

“I heard some players from Asskickers United were killed by Azure Falling Sky, so Asskickers United is gathering and planning to massacre Azure Falling Sky in retaliation!”

“Azure Falling Sky is finished!”

Nearly all of the several major battles that occurred in Calore had to do with Asskickers United, from the battle that occurred outside of Black Flame Forest to the absolute massacre of Unhindered and Victorious Return in Kiln Fire Woods. No matter how strong Azure Falling Sky was, could they match Victorious Return? This time, they were very likely going to be wiped out by Asskickers United.

Asskickers United should not be provoked!



## Chapter 226 – Berserk Power

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As the sun set, Twilight Forest would go through a long period of twilight during which a large number of Level 80 ghosts would spawn. At this point in the game, these ghosts were completely undefeatable. Because of their power, no one ever dared to linger in Twilight Forest when the sun was down, giving it its name.

Despite the danger of Twilight forest at night, it was very safe in the daytime. Only Level 25 monsters would spawn under the sun.

A crowd of over five hundred Azure Falling Sky players were busily farming mobs in Twilight Forest. Most of them were around Level 25 and could be considered elites within the guild. Moreover, about a hundred of them were even stronger, being from the Azure Falling Sky gaming organization. Theoretically, such a large force of players farming in the wilds was completely safe. After all, only the major guilds would be able to do anything to their group.

Unfortunately, over five hundred Withered Leaf Gaming Organization players clad in full sets of Gold equipment were heading their way to show them what a massacre was. Like a massive metal monster, their group slammed into the mob of Azure Falling Sky players with incredible momentum and instantly took out almost a hundred enemies. Then, they proceeded to viciously slaughter the remaining enemies.

The remaining four hundred people, with the professional players in the lead, began to fight back against Aqua Smoke Stub's force. Both sides continuously suffered casualties, but Azure Falling Sky had over a dozen times more losses than Withered

Leaf.

The people of Withered Leaf demonstrated extremely coordinated teamwork. A squad of Thieves circled around to the back unnoticed and took out the Priests in an ambush. At the same time, the Warriors in the front lines once more charged with renewed ferocity as they were bathed in the holy light of Indomitable Will. Despite the best efforts of the enemy, the Azure Falling Sky players were pushed back again and again in retreat.

According to Aqua Smoke Stub's plans, their first move would be to quickly wipe out this group of five hundred players. Then, they would immediately retreat from Twilight Forest and look for a place to clear their red names before once more looking for opportunities to take care of Azure Falling Sky.

However, just as they had killed around two hundred players, something completely unexpected happened.

The moment he heard the news, Azure Falling Sky's leader, Clear Sky, had immediately notified his nearby subordinates to rush over in a rescue mission. He had been lucky, as over a thousand players had been grinding in the area and were close enough to help.

These people had originally been scattered in small teams ranging from five to fifteen players each. When Withered Leaf's scouts first probed the area, they had ignored these small teams of players. After all, each group was just a small team and they couldn't possibly go through the entire forest with a fine-tooth comb. However, even though they were split into small teams,

there was a great number of Azure Falling Sky players spread across the map, and they kept flooding in to reinforce the group. As almost a thousand people amassed in the area, they were even able to hold off Aqua Smoke Stub's attack, stopping his momentum and completely foiling his original plans.

More Azure Falling Sky players kept streaming into the battle with every passing second, which caused Aqua Smoke Stub to become increasingly anxious about the situation.

"Boss, there's more and more of them! We've killed over five hundred of them but lost fifty of our own as well," Cold Peak Absolute Blade said as he repelled an incoming Azure Falling Sky Berserker with a well-placed Cleave. The Berserker, struck by his powerful blow, was sent flying.

Aqua Smoke Stub calculated the time that had passed. If they stayed there for long, Azure Falling Sky's main forces would arrive soon. Even though each member of their strike force was an elite who could take out multiple Azure Falling Sky players, they still weren't enough to eliminate an unending tide of thousands of players on their own.

"We're moving out! Everyone keep up!" Aqua Smoke Stub roared. He slammed into two enemies and knocked them flying with Charge. Then, he took a second two-handed greatsword out of his bag and activated Berserk Power. With this boosted strength, he wielded a greatsword in each hand as he fought.

Whirlwind Slash!

Swinging the two swords horizontally at the eight Berserkers surrounding him, he burst out with over five hundred damage to each.

This terrifying damage made them unable to do anything but look on in horror.

Aqua Smoke Stub stood tall, clad in an intimidating suit of spiked armor. Like a steel giant, he wielded the fearsome greatswords in his hands like one-handed swords, sending an opponent flying with each strike.

The Berserk Power skill allowed Aqua Smoke Stub's strength to increase several times in one go. This skill was a set bonus from his War God's Doctrine Set. A while back, five hundred people had gone together to explore the Level 30 Temple of the Dark God map, but he was the only one to come out alive with this extremely powerful set of armour as his reward. This set, which could be worn at Level 25, boasted absolutely incredible properties. Just the set bonus of Berserk Power was enough to make it extremely powerful. Berserk Power drastically increased Aqua Smoke Stub's strength as well as allowing two-handed swords to be wielded with one hand. Other skills' cooldowns would be shortened, but his defense and health would be decreased by 30%. The skill lasted for five minutes and had a cooldown of two days.

The effects of this skill were shocking. A two-handed greatsword often had around 60% higher stats than a one-handed sword of the same level. As a warrior, he could add 50% of his secondary weapon's attack to the weapon in his primary hand.

A greatsword in your dominant hand would automatically have massive attack. Once the 50% boost from an auxiliary weapon with similarly high attack was added to it, the primary weapon would rise to insane heights. No one would withstand such a ferocious attack!

With another Whirlwind Slash, another circle of sharp sword-lights flew out, causing another half dozen Berserkers and Fighters to collapse simultaneously.

There were already no Priests left in the back of Azure Falling Sky's forces, and the scattered Priests that had arrived later were nowhere near enough.

Having taken down the Warriors in the front, Aqua Smoke Stub moved on to the Mages behind. Cutting his opponents down as if he were a merciless meat grinder, the Berserker looked to be completely undefeatable.

A barrage of spells rained down on Aqua Smoke Stub's body, splattering around him in a multitude of colors. With both his health and defense decreased, his health points quickly approached zero. However, right when he was about to die, a ray of white light shined down on his body and restored his health. His health bar fluctuated heavily, and he even fell down to just a couple of health points a few times. Fortunately, the Priests were always able to save him and he was able to continue his onslaught.

"Die!" Smoke Stub boomed as he carved a line of blood through

Azure Falling Sky's Mages. The frail magic users fell to the ground one after another under his brutal offense.

Powerful Berserkers and even tanky Fighters couldn't survive two hits from his greatswords, so these cloth-armored Mages naturally were decimated within seconds.

Corpses piled up like mountains as blood flowed like rivers.

Aqua Smoke Stub's name was so red that anyone who looked at it would shiver in fear. Azure Falling Sky players watched in horror wherever he went, and some were even terrified to the point of peeing their pants. Those in his way scattered like flies lest they be cut down like so many before them.

Who could possibly fight this sword-swinging behemoth?

Cold Peak Absolute Blade simply followed in Smoke Stub's wake like a third greatsword. Azure Falling Sky's Mages also fell like dominoes under his attack.

"Boss, there's even more of them coming now! There's tons of players rushing over from both the East and the South!

"We charge to the North!" Aqua Smoke Stub checked his team roster again, only to see that dozens more of his subordinates had died. Smoke Stub's heart clenched in pain at the loss, because each and every member of his attack force today was one of Withered Leaf Gaming Organization's strongest elites. In a fit of rage, he had

ignored the warnings from his managers and brought troops here to unleash a slaughter. Now, however, he wasn't sure if he had made a fatal error.

After all, the gaming organization's only purpose was to generate a profit for its parent company, not avenge the deaths of its players. However, those who had been slain by Azure Falling Sky outside Bovine Prairie were all brothers he interacted with on a daily basis. These people had been surrounded and killed by sheer force of numbers, partly because of carelessness. Those brothers who would lose money due to this incident were all coworkers with families to feed, so how could Smoke Stub possibly swallow his anger?

「Today's matter was a result of my own reckless actions. I've led everyone into being surrounded. All of the losses of our brothers, I, Aqua Smoke Stub, will take sole responsibility for them!」Smoke Stub declared in the voice chat. The savings he had accumulated over the years should be enough to compensate these brothers for the losses they incurred.

「Boss! We followed you of our own free will! You don't have to feel guilty. Us dying has nothing to do with you!」

「At worst, we'll lose our bonuses. We dropped a few levels and our equipment, so what?!」

All of the players who had died spoke out one after another in the Withered Leaf group chat.

「Even if all of us have to die, we still have to get the boss out of here safely! His War God's Doctrine Set absolutely cannot be dropped!」 Cold Peak shouted. With a Berserk Slash, he sent an enemy Berserker flying.

Who among them hadn't gone through great hardships to finally obtain the gear they were currently equipped with?

If they died while branded with a red name, they would drop every single piece of equipment on their body. It was tantamount to their efforts being all for nought. If they lost all their equipment now, their earnings in the future would definitely be severely reduced.

Aqua Smoke Stub now regretted his own impulsiveness. He hadn't gathered enough information and considered enough possibilities before taking action. He hadn't expected there to be so many Azure Falling Sky players farming in nearby regions.

「Boss, there's almost 9,000 Azure Falling Sky players headed your way! You better get out of there fast!」a player who had died and respawned back in town frantically shouted in the guild chat.

Aqua Smoke Stub felt a chill run down his back. He hadn't expected Azure Falling Sky to assemble its forces so quickly. It could be seen that Clear Sky was very experienced in leading his guild.

「Brothers, we're going to break out of here! Hurry up!」



Smoke Stub swung his greatswords and sent several Mages from Azure Falling Sky flying. When he looked at the forest edge in the distance, he saw a group of brightly armoured Azure Falling Sky players moving to surround them, completely cutting off all route of escape!

Leading them was the guild leader of Azure Falling Sky, Clear Sky!

Clear Sky had a tall stature that was not the slightest bit inferior to Smoke Stub. He was a Paladin, clad in bright, silver-white armour which emanated a faint radiance. When he spotted Smoke Stub, his countenance flashed with a hint of sinister cruelty.

The hatred between Clear Sky and Smoke Stub ran very deep.

Smoke Stub was actually one of the founders of Azure Falling Sky. He used to own a 30% stake in the gaming organization. However, something happened that caused the two people to part ways, with Smoke Stub bringing a whole bunch of people away from Azure Falling Sky and founding Withered Leaf, which would then receive the financial support of the Tuoba Family.

Later on, because the two gaming organizations were competing rivals in every popular virtual reality game, the animosity between them only further solidified and deepened.

When enemies met face to face, their eyes would blaze with hatred!

The appearance of Clear Sky's group completely brought Withered Leaf's powerful momentum to a halt.

"Shit! It's Clear Sky!" Smoke Stub stared at Clear Sky. He was grasping the greatswords in his hands so tightly that the veins in his arms were exposed, and his eyes were bloodshot like an enraged lion.

"Boss! All of our escape routes have been cut off, and several of our Priests are running low on mana!" Samsara Lord, the main Priest responsible for healing, yelled. Azure Falling Sky players were streaming in from all directions.

In a while, almost 9,000 Azure Falling Sky players would arrive. When that time came, it would be certain calamity for Withered Leaf!

## Chapter 227 – Killing Intent!

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The enmity between Aqua Smoke Stub and Clear Sky started when several members of Azure Falling Sky wanted to transfer over to a different gaming organization. To Smoke Stub, this request couldn't be any simpler. Moving between organizations was common in the industry. Everyone would part without any hard feelings, and things would be less awkward if they crossed paths again in the future. However, Clear Sky evidently didn't share these feelings. He ruthlessly swore at those who wished to leave and threatened to break their legs. Even so, they still chose to withdraw from Azure Falling Sky, with Smoke Stub receiving information later on revealing that they really did end up coming to bodily harm.

This matter resulted in Smoke Stub feeling that Clear Sky was too ruthless. No longer wishing to be associated with a person like this, he led his brothers out of Azure Falling Sky and created Withered Leaf. However, the establishment of his own gaming organization was filled with numerous twists and turns. Many of the people under him were hounded and assaulted; one even had their leg broken and ended up hospitalized for nearly half a year. All of this was orchestrated by Azure Falling Sky.

Only then did Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky become irreconcilable enemies. For a long time, Withered Leaf couldn't run their operations smoothly because of the constant meddling of Azure Falling Sky. It wasn't until Withered Leaf accepted the investment of the Tuoba Family Financial Group that Azure Falling Sky backed off, fearing the influence of this backer. However, such protection came at a heavy price, as every last member of Withered Leaf entered what basically amounted to a slave contract with the Tuoba Family.

The amount of effort Smoke Stub and his brothers poured into the gaming organization all this time was nothing short of remarkable. It was the only reason Withered Leaf had achieved its current successes, carrying a slew of impressive accomplishments.

The struggle between Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky never ceased. Both gaming organizations were generally evenly matched across the various virtual reality games they fought in. However, the reason Withered Leaf currently found itself at a disadvantage laid in the fact that it didn't establish a guild immediately upon entering Conviction, though that was through no fault of Smoke Stub. After all, Azure Falling Sky was an autonomous entity, while Withered Leaf was subsidiary of the Tuoba Family.

As Smoke Stub recalled the brother who had his leg broken, his expression turned ferocious like a vicious beast, wishing for nothing more than to tear Clear Sky apart.

"Tuoba Family dog, today, I'm going to have you die in front of me! I bet losing your cherished War God's Doctrine Set will pain you dearly!" Clear Sky sinisterly chuckled.

"A debt of blood will be repaid in blood! Today's hatred won't be forgotten!" Smoke Stub gritted his teeth as he tightly gripped his greatswords. He calmly calculated the likelihood of killing Clear Sky if he were to rush up and attempt to behead him right now, only to discover to his disappointment it was basically impossible unless Clear Sky remained motionless, letting him move and act as he wished.

“Hmph! Before worrying about revenge, you better start thinking about how you’re going to explain yourself to the Tuoba Family. If they find out you lost the War God’s Doctrine Set, they might really drive you away. You’ll truly become a stray mongrel!”

「Cold Peak, Wood Grace, cover me!」Smoke Stub commanded through the voice chat in a heavy tone. He was preparing to take on Clear Sky!

「Boss, don’t be rash. I just received word that Asskickers United is rushing over to back us up.」Cold Peak put his hand over Smoke Stub’s arm, making him lower his sword.

Asskickers United? What are they coming here for? Smoke Stub knitted his brows. From the perspective of a guild leader, in the best interest of the guild, it absolutely wasn’t necessary for Nie Yan to help out Withered Leaf. After all, their relationship was purely that of contractor and contractee, and the duration of the contract was only one month. Withered Leaf joining Asskickers United temporarily was merely for the sake of obtaining a prince title in the Union of Assassins, and to scout out the true strength of the guild.

Was it worthwhile making an enemy out of Azure Falling Sky for a collaborative partner like them? No, it wasn’t! You could even say it was needlessly reckless!

Smoke Stub didn’t expect Nie Yan to bring all of Asskickers United with him on his arrival, so much so that he didn’t hesitate to offend Azure Falling Sky. His heart was filled with complicated emotions, as a few subordinates shared the declaration Nie Yan

made in the guild chat, as well as the outcry of support from the players of Asskickers United demanding that the guild help Withered Leaf.

Smoke Stub sighed. He never thought the players of Asskickers United would truly come to view Withered Leaf as brothers who they were willing to rescue no matter the cost!

It was like if you didn't even consider a person a friend, but they treated you like a sworn brother!

Smoke Stub couldn't help but feel ashamed.「Everyone, defend! Try to stay alive while our brothers from Asskickers United make their way over! Even though we've only been in the guild for several days, they're willing to offend Azure Falling Sky to rescue us! We can't let their efforts go to waste! From this day onward, all the players of Asskickers United are brothers of our Withered Leaf, and we'll never do anything to make them enemies. If this oath is ever violated, may the heavens strike us down!」

「Yes!」The players of Withered Leaf roared in unison.

The over three hundred surviving players of Withered Leaf formed a wide circle as they resolutely defended against the barrage of attacks from Azure Falling Sky.

As more enemies gathered in the area, the shower of spells raining down from the sky intensified, causing the players of Withered Leaf to gradually fall one after the other.

“Boss, forces from Asskickers United are moving in our direction. There’s at least ten thousand of them!” a subordinate whispered into Clear Sky’s ear.

Clear Sky’s expression darkened. Wasn’t Withered Leaf simply hire labour for Asskickers United? Why were they willing to help them out? Could it be that the information he received was wrong?

The Tuoba Family declared long ago that Withered Leaf joining Asskickers United was business, and that Withered Leaf wouldn’t be participating in any guild wars!

Clear Sky swept his gaze over Smoke Stub and the other surviving Withered Leaf players. They had already formed a tight, defensive circle. They would definitely be able to hold out for a while.

If they dallied any longer, Asskickers United’s forces would arrive. If he let Smoke Stub go now, it would be next to impossible to get another chance as good as this in the future.

Clear Sky hardened his resolve, then shouted to the elites beside him, “Everyone, break their defensive formation. Annihilate Withered Leaf!”

Just as his voice fell, everyone felt a violent fluctuation of magical energy in the distance before spotting scorching, red clouds congregating in the sky. Before long, raging flames began raining down, battering the numerous players from Azure Falling Sky.

-207, -230...

Even though it wasn't advanced magic, the spell still dealt astonishing damage. Soon, an empty section of space opened in the middle of the crowd of Azure Falling Sky players. Everything there was burned away!

Hordes of Asskickers United players rushed over from every direction. Several Warriors clad in full sets of Gold equipment charged straight out of the forest.

"Kill!" The players from Asskickers United let out thunderous battle cries. Resplendent Bladelight led the vanguard, enduring the impact of several hundred spells as he charged into the crowd of Mages. While his health fell bit by bit, a gentle radiance descended on him, restoring it back to full.

All the Mages from Azure Falling Sky paled with fright. Just where did such a perverse Fighter come from?

Bladelight attracted the attention of a great number of Mages. The Warriors behind him finally caught up, as they charged forward, sweeping away the enemy Mages.

Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, Miracle Dancer, and the other Mages from Asskickers United rained down a dense torrent of spells.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Explosions rang out across the Warriors from Azure Falling Sky. A blanket of damage numbers with sky high values rose up into the air, as enemy players began toppling to



the ground.

Undying Scoundrel rubbed his nose with a cheerful smile. “Such a lively gathering, how could we be left out?”

The elites of Asskickers United carried out a one-sided slaughter on Azure Falling Sky. Swaths of enemy players were annihilated without the ability to resist in the slightest. In terms of cooperation and judgement, the players from Azure Falling Sky simply couldn’t hold a candle to the Asskickers United players who were as brave as tigers!

“Hey, Smoke Stub, you really are no fun. With such a lively party going on here, how could you not invite us brothers from Asskickers United?” Almost like a ghost, Nie Yan materialized beside Smoke Stub with a faint smile.

Clear Sky, who was about to charge over, suddenly felt his blood run cold at the sight of Nie Yan. How did this Thief get in here? His forces outside were still engaged in fierce combat. With so many of his subordinates locking down the area, the fact that this player still somehow snuck past them was astonishing!

This appearance... the Mad Rogue, Nirvana Flame!

All of the surrounding Azure Falling Sky players felt like a heavy blow was dealt to their hearts, as their faces tightened with fear.

When the name of the Mad Rogue was mentioned, what almost

everyone recalled was that unrivalled strike in Kiln Fire Woods!

Nie Yan's presence on the battlefield was an immense deterrent. As long as he acted, anyone that he wished dead would almost certainly die. That was what was the most frightening!

With regards to the struggle between Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky, Nie Yan was knowledgeable about the history, albeit not by much. However, based on how Smoke Stub and Clear Sky conducted themselves, he could easily distinguish between who was unscrupulous or principled.

Smoke Stub's group also didn't expect Nie Yan to appear. He really was like a specter.

Listening to Nie Yan's teasing words, Smoke Stub replied with an apologetic smile, "I was wrong in this matter. When we get back, I'll apologize again to our brothers in Asskickers United!"

Brother—what a warm and sentimental way of address! Smoke Stub couldn't help feel this way.

"Well, it seems things blew up. Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, and Holy Empire are about to arrive as well. Who knows whether or not more guilds will join in. This matter isn't simply between Withered Leaf and Azure Falling Sky anymore." Nie Yan's gaze fell on a Paladin clad in silver-white armour among the crowd of Azure Falling Sky players. [His eyes narrowed, while his lips curved into a thin smile.](#) "That's Clear Sky, I presume?"

“Right, that’s him.” Smoke Stub nodded. His eyes flashed with a cold light like the tip of a sharp blade.

Nie Yan examined the equipment on Smoke Stub’s body. It’s only been a few days, but this guy’s already got himself a War God’s Doctrine Set. Hmmm? Even dual-wielding greatswords, not bad. Quite valiant, indeed.

“How much time do you have left on Berserk Power?” Nie Yan asked.

“About a minute,” Smoke Stub replied. He was a little confused. Why did Nie Yan suddenly ask such a question?

“That Clear Sky seems pretty full of himself. What say you and I kill him together? He’s quite an eyesore just standing there,” Nie Yan offered in a casual tone as he played with the dagger in his hand.

The Withered Leaf players felt their hearts tremble. Clear Sky was protected by so many people. Perhaps, only Nie Yan would dare to utter such bold words.

“Are you confident?” Smoked Stub stared at Nie Yan, his eyes reflecting the stirred emotions in his heart.

Was the Mad Rogue about to bring about another legend?

Nie Yan waved his hand, then laughed in a helpless manner. “Of

course not! We Thieves have very weak attack power. A hit from my dagger will only help a Paladin scratch an itch at best. He's too tanky!"

Smoke Stub immediately understood the meaning behind these words. Nie Yan wanted his assistance in killing Clear Sky!

"Help me kill Clear Sky, and from today onward... you, Nirvana Flame, will be my sworn brother!" Smoke Stub declared in a solemn tone.

"Oh? I'm a bit saddened that you don't already think of me as a brother. Don't worry, though. I'm the type who's used to unreciprocated love."

Smoke Stub knew Nie Yan was simply playing a joke. He let out an embarrassed laugh. Right at this moment, Nie Yan's figure disappeared, signalling that he was making his move. Smoke Stub tightly gripped the greatswords in his hands, while his eyes beamed with killing intent!

## Chapter 228 – Killing Clear Sky

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When they saw Nie Yan disappear, Clear Sky and his men felt their hearts tighten.

With his ability to hide under stealth, Nie Yan was undoubtedly worthy of his reputation. Trying to keep track of him was truly a difficult task. This was the Mad Rogue, after all! If he took action, he definitely wouldn't fail!

“Everyone, attack!” Clear Sky roared. His men charged at their enemies, but he was still worried. Nie Yan's abrupt disappearance left him rather unsettled. He couldn't help but suspect that Nie Yan was coming after him.

Clear Sky had hundreds of Azure Falling Sky players in close formation around him, creating a solid line of defense. Plus, Clear Sky himself was in the densest part of this massive army. Even the Mad Rogue wouldn't be able to threaten him here!

“Priests, Illuminate!”

“Paladins, Eyes of the Divine!”

The Azure Falling Sky players nervously called out for skills that would reveal a player in stealth. Rays of light pierced through various parts of the battlefield as they tried to locate Nie Yan.

Right there!

A Priest noticed an approaching silhouette five meters away from himself, but had no time to react. His comrades didn't notice a thing as the shadow passed by him. He felt a dagger stabbing into his throat and reflexively jumped back in horror.

Terrified by the thought of having lost his life just now, the Priest instinctively grabbed at his throat, finding neither the dagger nor the blood he was expecting. His throat was fine. It was just his imagination fueled by fear. The dagger had swiped within centimeters of his throat as Nie Yan passed by.

Nie Yan had missed on purpose to scare him as he brushed past. Had he really attacked, then his stealth would've broken.

This intimidation tactic proved to be extremely effective. The Priest, despite having noticed him, didn't dare to wantonly draw attention to Nie Yan. If the Mad Rogue was irked by him, he could die without ever seeing where the attack came from!

Nie Yan threaded through dozens of players in a blur. He flashed by so quickly that none of them even had the time to breath, much less attack. His speed reached frightening heights as he left the Azure Falling Sky elites he passed far behind.

This was the speed of a Shadow Dancer!

When one's speed and evasion reached a certain point, they would form a certain resonance. By complementing each other perfectly, both would soar to even higher levels!

This was the ultimate manifestation of the system's data. When an object was in movement, it could enter a state of resonance. The system used its unique method to simulate a virtual universe that closely resembled reality. The laws of physics within were all determined by its calculations. Gravitational acceleration, kinematics, the rules of magic, and even one's strength, intelligence, and dexterity all followed the directives of the system. Additionally, it even defined an extremely rich history, the detailed Atlanta Continent, and the rest of the game's universe. This was the mesmerizing world of Conviction.

When a player advanced into their ultimate class title, they would have an opportunity to comprehend the natural laws of this virtual world.

All these laws were manifested from immense amounts of data.

After comprehending these laws, you could utilize the virtual world's data to bring about absolute power. Where a regular player might only be able to add two statistics to show off their powers, an ultimate class player could use a connection between the two in the laws in order to multiply those statistics. These multiplications would result in far greater results than mere additions could possibly achieve.

Different classes would unravel different mysteries. Warriors pursued the peak of strength, Mages sought the greatest magic resonance, Paladins prayed for the holy light, and Shadow Dancers moved toward ultimate speed.

An expert player had to calculate the most optimum method with data! Only by using data could you maximize your power!

This was the mystery Nie Yan had comprehended about Shadow Dancers!

Nie Yan, having sidestepped another line of Azure Falling Sky players, closed in on Clear Sky like a shadow. The feeling of speed transforming into more under the soles of his feet gave him a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

However, even after comprehending the skills of a Shadow Dancer, there were still higher mountains to climb.

Nie Yan recalled the videos he'd seen of Shadow Dancers running rampant in the past. One after another they flashed through his mind, their footsteps superimposing onto his own as he ran.

Such a thrilling feeling!

Nie Yan suddenly recalled a move the Shadow Dancers of the past liked to flaunt: Dance of Death!

While running swiftly, they would lighten their breathing and perfect their hiding. While the opponent was still completely unaware, they would strike from behind to deal massive damage! Just like the scythe of Death, quietly reaping the foe.

Nie Yan slowed down a little. Although he was no longer running



at top speed, his movements became more erratic and evasive.

“He’s there! Stop him!”

A couple of Paladins saw a faint figure with their Eyes of the Divine. Activating Indomitable Will, they moved forward to intercept him. However, by the time they had taken their first few steps, they found they were no longer looking at their target.

By the time they charged over, he was long gone.

Nie Yan smirked to himself as he easily escaped the Paladins’ vision.

“Where’d he go?”

“I dunno.”

Clear Sky himself activated Eyes of the Divine as well. From the corner of his left eye, an indistinct blur registered about sixty meters. When he turned his head to look more closely, it was already gone. Having seen that Nie Yan still had to cross such a large distance layered with Priests and Paladins, Clear Sky looked away as his shoulders loosened a fraction.

Just as Clear Sky relaxed, one of his subordinates gave a startled shout from the right. A figure could be seen ramming through Azure Falling Sky players on his way towards him.

Aqua Smoke Stub's eyes flashed murderously as he advanced with his twin greatswords in hand.

Whirlwind Slash!

Damage values exceeding five hundred blotted out the sky.

The swords murderously struck as Smoke Stub's violent momentum slammed him into player after player. The Warriors struck by his greatswords were knocked back, afraid to come near him. None of them had enough health to tank another blow.

Behind him, Cold Peak Absolute Blade and Wood Grace cleaned up the stragglers without mercy. Blood splattered all over the place as the two of them finished off everyone in their path.

Ball after ball of fire fizzled out on Smoke Stub's body, swiftly draining his health. However, the heals from behind came just as quickly, bathing him in rays of white light.

The matter of Smoke Stub's survival was really just a race between Azure Falling Sky's Mages and Withered Leaf's Priests.

Withered Leaf's Priests clearly held the lead. Their heals made the enemy's spells look weak. A single Priest could cover the damage of three, sometimes even four Mages. Because of this, they managed to maintain a solid advantage.

Azure Falling Sky players parted like the [Red Sea before Moses](#) as they cleared out of Smoke Stub's way. Anyone who tried to stop him got simply shredded!

Out of nowhere, a few Warriors wearing Gold armour sets held up Cold Peak. A barrage of spells blasted his health to smithereens while Withered Leaf's Priests were all focused on Smoke Stub. They didn't notice his plight until it was too late. He was blasted off his feet and crashed into the ground.

Cold Peak was one of Withered Leaf's best players, as well as a good brother to Smoke Stub. Seeing his close friend die just like that, Smoke Stub became even more enraged.

Charge!

Smoke Stub smashed through another dozen people trying to surround him, continuing his onslaught.

"Boss, I got this group!" Wood Grace yelled as he rushed toward the next half dozen Gold-clad Warriors in a nigh-suicidal attack.

Clear Sky's right there! Having just slaughtered a path through the heavy encirclement with incredible momentum, Smoke Stub sprinted the final stretch toward Clear Sky.

Seeing Smoke Stub in front of him, Clear Sky felt no fear whatsoever. He buffed himself with a few blessings, increasing his stats and greatly boosting his damage reduction. He raised his

sword, ready to take on Smoke Stub.

“Clear Sky, go to hell!” Smoke Stub abruptly leapt into the air, slicing down with Cleave to produce a massive sword-light akin to a rainbow.

Clear Sky took a quick step back, raising his guard to block. If they clashed head-on, he knew that his strength would be on par with Smoke Stub’s. The other’s path of retreat had already been cut off, so if he could stall for just a little, Smoke Stub would be dead for sure.

Clear Sky had just readied himself to stop the attack when he felt a cold chill behind his back.

A certain person popped into his mind, Nirvana Flame!

How did Nie Yan avoid being revealed by so many Priests and Paladins? This was impossible, like something out of a legend!

If he was stunned from behind by Nie Yan, then received the full brunt of Smoke Stub’s ferocious attacks, he would undoubtedly die!

So it seemed the two of them had already planned things out. Under the protection of so many Azure Falling Sky players, Clear Sky believed he was safe. However, he never expected his subordinates to be powerless as Smoke Stub and Nie Yan easily broke through them and arrived in front of him.

“Mad Rogue, huh? Let’s see what you’ve got!” Clear Sky roared, giving himself another blessing, then striking out at Nie Yan with a Rending Blow while moving to evade Smoke Stub’s attack.

His movements were extremely quick!

Intimidate!

Before Clear Sky could get off his skill, Nie Yan forcibly cancelled it by activating Intimidate.

Clear Sky halted in place, and at this critical moment, Smoke Stub’s Cleave landed on his body and sent him skidding backwards.

Just as the nearby Priest who was responsible for supporting Clear Sky raised his staff to cast a Heal, a silhouette appeared behind him. It was Nie Yan!

Nie Yan interrupted the casting of the spell with a kick, then struck out with Vital Strike, slashing open the Priest’s throat.

-556!

A damage value floated up above the Priest’s head before he collapsed to the ground.

Just as Clear Sky regained his footing from being hit by the Cleave, Smoke Stub rammed into him with a Charge and sent him staggering quite a few steps back. Thanks to Smoke Stub's precise use of the skill, he was pushed exactly to where Nie Yan was standing.

Clear Sky, who was buffed with blessings, already had a health bar of over 1,000. Smoke Stub's ferocious attacks had caused him to drop down to 300 health.

Normally, Clear Sky always had a dedicated Priest by his side, while the other Priests were tasked with healing the other Azure Falling Sky players. However, that Priest was just killed by Nie Yan. So when the other Priests realized Clear Sky's health had fallen low, it was already too late.

Just as Clear Sky was about to cast a Lesser Heal on himself to buy himself some precious time for the other Priests to heal him, Nie Yan's dagger cleanly cut across his throat.

-302!

Clear Sky's pupils suddenly constricted with an incredulous look on his face. He never imagined Nie Yan would quietly emerge behind at this time and deal him a fatal blow.

Nie Yan and Smoke Stub's teamwork was flawless. From the time Smoke Stub rammed into Clear Sky with Charge to Nie Yan delivering the finishing blow, only a few seconds had transpired. Many people had yet to process what just transpired. When

everyone finally stopped what they were doing to look over, they saw Clear Sky's corpse lying beside Nie Yan and Smoke Stub's feet.

# Chapter 229 – Meeting Of The Big Shots

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Nie Yan and Smoke Stub's actions plunged the Azure Falling Sky guild into chaos.

The Charge executed by Smoke Stub just a moment ago was perfect, whether in timing, power, or direction, as it delivered Clear Sky right to Nie Yan, who finished him off with a decisive blow from [Cut Throat](#). The coordination between them was impeccable. If someone posted a video of this battle online, the final moments would inevitably become a classic.

“It was a pleasure fighting together,” Nie Yan said with a light smile before going back into stealth.

Smoke Stub also found battling alongside Nie Yan to be extremely enjoyable. With a wide smile on his face, he exclaimed, “Likewise!”

Both Cold Peak and Wood Grace had sacrificed their lives in order to give them the perfect opportunity to kill Clear Sky. A hint of sorrow emerged in Smoke Stub's eyes, but he quickly regained his composure. This was a battlefield; he didn't have any time to be wasting wallowing in grief. He charged back into the fray with his greatsword raised. It was time for Withered Leaf to strike back!

“Brothers of Withered Leaf, slaughter these bastards!” Smoke Stub roared. He was the living embodiment of the reaper's scythe. Wherever he passed, heads would fall.



Nie Yan's actions left people breathless as he materialized behind unsuspecting Priests, and killed them with lightning-fast efficiency before disappearing again like a phantom in the battlefield. Numerous players ended up dying by his hands.

The elites from Asskickers United broke through the enemy lines. Azure Falling Sky players dropped like flies while the survivors were slowly forced into retreat.

Undying Scoundrel unleashed a torrent of fire on a crowd of Azure Falling Sky players. As a blanket of damage numbers floated up into the sky, more than half the players were immediately annihilated.

Monochrome, Edgeless, and the others steamrolled through the enemies before joining up with Nie Yan and Smoke Stub's group.

"Boss, we're here!" Monochrome greeted. He as well as the others were branded with deep red names. It was evident they had killed many players along the way.

Nie Yan nodded. "How are our losses?"

"Only eight casualties so far, and we've retrieved all the equipment they dropped," Edgeless replied. Such losses in a large-scale battle were very small, negligible even. Before they launched their assault, they had gone through careful preparation. With the protection of the Warriors and Paladins, Summer Bug, Undying Scoundrel, Miracle Dancer, Sunny South, and the other mages swept away the enemy with group magic. The results were

excellent.

As a consequence, the kill counts of Summer Bug and the other Mages skyrocketed upwards.

By now, the guild leader of Azure Falling Sky, Clear Sky, resurrected in Calore. He had actually died to Smoke Stub. This was his greatest disgrace!

「I don't care what it takes, I want Smoke Stub's head!」Clear Sky roared. His eyes were bloodshot, and the veins on his forehead bulged out.

Clear Sky's hatred for Smoke Stub was engraved into the core of his very being. Even though he knew the forces of Asskickers United were rushing over, he still chose to take the risk of eliminating Smoke Stub instead of retreating.

Clear Sky's orders were carried out efficiently as the players under him quickly gathered together. Despite his explosive temper and callous nature, to the extent where every minor grievance had to be paid back manyfold, he was still a competent commander. His forces soon moved to surround Smoke Stub's group.

There were almost 9,000 players from Azure Falling Sky altogether. Even if every last one of them had to be sacrificed, he would make certain that Smoke Stub died!

「Boss, at least 8,000 Azure Falling Sky players are moving in to

surround us!」

「Boss, our Priests and Mages are running low on mana, and we've already gone through all of our mana-recovery items.」

Nie Yan listened to a litany of reports from various leaders commanding over the battlefield.

The battle was still in full swing. The forces from Asskickers United had already mowed down almost 800 players from Azure Falling Sky, but more and more kept pouring in to fill the gaps! When confronted with a seemingly endless wave of enemies, no matter how strong the elites of Asskickers United were, they couldn't help but feel a deep sense of helplessness.

Nie Yan surveyed the surroundings and noted that the forest to the south was denser. If they could get there and hold out a little longer, Tang Yao's forces would arrive to reinforce them.

「We're moving south!」

Nie Yan led his group southward, cutting down any Azure Falling Sky player who stood in their path. After they arrived, the Warriors hunkered down between the trees, while the Priests and Paladins took turns providing support for them. The Mages separated into groups, alternating between firing spells at the enemy and sitting down to recover their mana.

The Azure Falling Sky players arrived like an unending tide, but

Nie Yan's forces firmly resisted and beat them back.

The flames of war enveloped the battlefield as magic rained down from the sky. Every now and then, a player from Withered Leaf or Asskickers United would collapse to the ground.

The hordes of players around them were all from Azure Falling Sky. They arrived wave after wave with no end in sight.

"I'm sorry for dragging you guys into this mess," Smoke Stub said in a guilt-ridden tone. Every single member of Nie Yan's group was branded with a red name, meaning they were barred from returning to Calore and effectively trapped here. If reinforcements didn't arrive soon, they would be completely overwhelmed.

"Aren't you treating us a bit too much like outsiders? Ask any of our brothers from Asskickers United. None of them blame you. Even though Withered Leaf hasn't been a part of the guild for very long, you're still our brothers through and through! When a brother is in trouble, with how much we value loyalty, how could we just heartlessly leave them to their fate?" Undying Scoundrel turned to Nie Yan and asked, "Isn't that right, Boss?"

"Mhmm, right." Nie Yan nodded with approval. Undying Scoundrel's words were very sensible.

Smoke Stub was visibly moved as he gazed at the Asskickers United players around him. Saying anymore at this point would be meaningless. Withered Leaf wouldn't fail to reciprocate the sincerity of these brothers.

“Boss Sparrow Hawk has already arrived at Twilight Forest with reinforcements! He’s going to be here very soon!” Summer Bug exclaimed after reading the guild chat.

Tang Yao’s forces were about to come to their rescue!

“Everyone, persevere! Reinforcements will be arriving soon!”

Withered Leaf still had over 200 members alive while Asskickers United still had over 70. Considering they had been holding off almost 9,000 enemies all this time, this was quite amazing.

“Boss Smoke Stub! We’re all out of mana!” Samsara Lord anxiously called out.

The attacks of the enemy Mages were too ferocious. For the sake of keeping the Warriors in the frontline alive, the Priests had burnt through all their mana. Because the healing couldn’t keep up, several Warriors died.

The onslaught of attacks from the Azure Falling Sky players was relentless. If Tang Yao’s reinforcements didn’t arrive within the next few minutes, there would be no one left to save.

At this moment, there was a huge disturbance among the Azure Falling Sky players.

Red clouds converged in the distance, followed immediately by a shower of meteors. With how quickly that magic was cast, likely the only person who could pull such a feat off was Tang Yao.

“Brothers! Kill!”

“Kill!”

Thunderous battle cries shook the air, as Tang Yao’s reinforcements surrounded and attacked the forces from Azure Falling Sky. In terms of individual player ability, no guild could match Asskickers United! Once the two sides clashed, a one-sided massacre began unfolding as Azure Falling Sky players collapsed in droves. Because they were surrounded on all sides, there was nowhere for them to escape.

While Twilight Forest was filled with the sound of battle, things on the outside weren’t so tranquil either. Over 60,000 players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had arrived outside of Twilight Forest. Just as they were about to storm the map, countless players silently emerged from the edge of the forest, ready to obstruct their advance.

It appeared Holy Empire was faster than them by a step at arriving in Twilight Forest.

These players from Holy Empire were well prepared. Groups of Warriors and Paladins blocked the gaps between the trees. Behind them were a great number of Priests and Mages. On top of this, they occupied the [high ground](#). Even though Radiant Sacred Flame

and Victorious Return had greater numbers, it wouldn't be easy for them to break through this blockade.

Sleepy Fox proudly stood atop a large protruding boulder.

As the players behind Sleepy Fox stared at the densely packed crowd of players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, they couldn't help but feel their scalps turn a little numb.

“Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame have arrived. Those who are afraid can activate a Return Scroll right now. Holy Empire doesn't need weaklings. As for the brothers who are willing to stay behind, I'll reward you with 50 merit points for every bastard you kill from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. If you kill more than 10, I'll allow you to enter the Holy Empire Knight Regiment! Today, we'll show these Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame mongrels that 20,000 of us are enough to beat them back yelping with their tails tucked between their legs!” Sleepy Fox declared, full of bravado. He had learned a thing or two from Nie Yan. When trouble arrived on your doorstep, you had to be decisive. It was important not to show any weakness.

Sleepy Fox's passionate speech stirred the spirits of the players from Holy Empire.

“Boss, these are your words. You can't go back on them! What luck. I was just considering trying out for the Knight Regiment!” a Holy Empire player shouted.

Sleepy Fox jokingly scolded. “Since when have I failed to keep my word? Brat, I’ve remembered your name. If you can’t kill at least ten players, I’ll send you off on your way so you can repent to God himself!”

“W-w-wait! No, Boss, I was just joking! You might as well just dig a hole and bury me inside. I’d rather repent to you instead!” that player cried out in a panic.

The crowd burst into laughter. The previously heavy atmosphere lightened up quite a bit.

Sleepy Fox looked ahead and spotted two figures walking over to him. He was very familiar with these two individuals. The player wearing azure robes was Heaven Breaker, while the other player clad in violet armour was the guild leader of Radiant Sacred Flame, Nightbreak Trickster.

Nightbreak Trickster rarely showed his face to the outside world, so few people ever knew his whereabouts. Because of this, he was a mysterious figure in the eyes of all players. Very little was known about him, aside from what was publically available.

“The guild leaders of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame have arrived. You guys stay put. I’ll go have a chat with them.” Sleepy Fox leapt off the boulder, then went over to meet Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster.

Damn! This son of a bitch is already Level 30! Sleepy Fox gloomily cursed after examining Nightbreak Trickster’s level.



This was the first time since Conviction's release that the guild leaders of three major guilds met.

"I didn't expect to see you here," Heaven Breaker said. When he led his troops here, he never would've imagined Holy Empire would make a full-out effort to block their path.

"Oh? But I've already been waiting quite a while for the two of you to show up," Sleepy Fox curtly said.

Sleepy Fox could be considered an old rival to Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster. Both of them were very familiar with his personality, so they were a little surprised when he acted so differently from his usual self. He was normally all smiles, handling all matters with a glib tongue. Even if he was upset, he would never reveal it on the surface.

The swords were already drawn on both sides.

## Chapter 230 – Soaring Morale

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Aside from the incident that occurred outside of Black Flame Forest, Holy Empire didn't have any conflicting interests with Victorious Return. As for Radiant Sacred Flame, the war between them had already developed to the extent where both sides were willing to do whatever necessary to win, no matter the price.

Occupying a stronghold was equal to receiving the taxes of a small city. This was extremely critical to the growth of a guild.

Neither Holy Empire nor Radiant Sacred Flame were willing to back down!

Even the always low-key Nightbreak Trickster crawled out of the woodwork in preparation for the upcoming stronghold battle. And the biggest supporter on his side was his closest ally, Heaven Breaker. Although Victorious Return couldn't participate in the stronghold battle because they weren't yet a Level 5 guild, their strength couldn't be looked over.

Since Radiant Sacred Flame required the assistance of Victorious Return to capture the stronghold, when Victorious Return wanted to cause Asskickers United some trouble this time, Radiant Sacred Flame would naturally follow. However, they didn't expect Holy Empire to be a step ahead of them!

The smell of gunpowder floated in the air as soon as Sleepy Fox and Nightbreak Trickster locked gazes.

Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame could be described as eternal foes, with numerous battles spread across various popular virtual reality games. So whenever they met, sparks would fly, emotions would run high, and conflict would be unavoidable.

“So what if you’re here? I’d like to see just how your 20,000 players can stop our force of over 60,000!” Nightbreak Trickers narrowed his eyes as his killing intent flared.

“Well, we’re right here. What are you waiting for? You’re free to try. Let’s see if you really can get through us!” Sleepy Fox coldly responded. So long as Holy Empire held steadfast at the border of Twilight Forest, let alone 60,000 players, he would even dare to clash against a force of 100,000!

In any large-scale battle, having a terrain advantage was extremely important. By having the high ground, the enemy’s ranged units would have a harder time hitting your forces. If there were natural obstacles such as boulders or trees, your forces could rely on them to take cover.

The trees in Twilight Forest were the best obstacles.

Nightbreak Trickster surveyed the topography up ahead. It was densely forested with large boulders scattered all around. Holy Empire players were positioned all along the forest edge. Even if he had a Mage cast advanced magic, it would have a very limited effect. The area was a natural stronghold. No wonder Sleepy Fox boasted such confidence.

Nonetheless, the combined forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were more than triple that of Holy Empire! With such an overwhelming advantage in numbers, if they coordinated their attacks well throughout the battle, they could nullify the opponent's terrain advantage.

「What's the situation in Twilight Forest?」Nightbreak Trickster asked Heaven Breaker through chat.

Heaven Breaker looked through the information provided by his subordinates.「Azure Falling Sky is collapsing. It's a one-sided slaughter over there.」

「Asskickers United is that powerful?」Nightbreak Trickster asked in shock. Although Azure Falling Sky wasn't a large guild, its members were not weak. According to his judgment, they should've had no problem holding out for a while. However, reality proved otherwise.

「The guild leader of Azure Falling Sky, Clear Sky, was sent to the graveyard early in the battle by Aqua Smoke Stub and Nirvana Flame. They've hidden themselves well. In every battle leading up to this one, they've never displayed their full fighting strength.」Heaven Breaker furrowed his brows. Logically, it was impossible for Clear Sky not to have people guarding his side, so how did Nie Yan and Smoke Stub make such quick work of him?

Heaven Breaker had a pensive look on his face as he recalled the scene of Nie Yan killing Hei Zhuo in Kiln Fire Woods. It seemed the main problem was still Nie Yan! It was just like when he reversed the situation in his battle with Yu Long. This Thief was too

terrifying. You simply couldn't let your guard down around him!

“Even if you had brought along more people, your journey would've still ended here. So you mangy mongrels, how about you save me the effort by scrambling back home right now?” Sleepy Fox gave Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster a disdainful gaze. This was an obvious provocation to goad them into ordering their forces to attack. He was confident Holy Empire could hold firm at least for a short time. When Asskickers United cleaned up all the players from Azure Falling Sky, they would definitely rush over to provide assistance. From the information he received from Nie Yan, Asskickers United had brought over 30,000 players. If they combined forces, they wouldn't be the slightest bit weaker than Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. Furthermore, Sapphire Shrine was also on the move. When Fa Lan found out two powerhouses like Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return teamed up, he naturally understood the severity of the matter. Sapphire Shrine might be able to defend itself right now, but what about in the future?

“So what if you have the terrain advantage? You still won't be able to stop us. Brothers of Radiant Sacred Flame, wipe out every last one of these fools from Holy Empire! Kill!” Nightbreak Trickster roared, as he commanded his troops to launch an assault. Before long, a group of 4,000 Warriors charged toward the area where Holy Empire's defenses were the weakest. The Mages raised their staffs, which glowed with brilliant rays, as they began chanting spells.

Holy Empire didn't stay motionless either. They held fast to their positions and began trading fire with Radiant Sacred Flame.

Magic exploded into the sky like a dazzling display of fireworks.

Since Radiant Sacred Flame had acted, Victorious Return naturally followed suit. The players Heaven Breaker commanded charged toward Holy Empire's forces with overwhelming momentum.

The battle started off in a very one-sided manner as the forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame drowned the players from Holy Empire with an unrelenting barrage of attacks.

However, Holy Empire remained unyielding, reinforcing their defenses everywhere as they withstood the assault.

The flames of battle erupted out with no signs of waning.

Back in Twilight Forest, Azure Falling Sky's forces couldn't endure the assault from the players of Asskickers United, especially Tang Yao who was sweeping through them with his frightening damage and cast speed. With a Meteor, he completely cleaned out a large area. Then with a Firestorm, he took out another several hundred players. He was wildly reaping the lives of the Azure Falling Sky players like harvesting wheat.

Nie Yan and the others also carried out a massacre. As they worked in concert, Azure Falling Sky players toppled wherever they passed.

Before long, the battle was over. Nie Yan, Smoke Stub, and the

others were safe. This incident was the catalyst which allowed the bond between Asskickers United and Withered Leaf to grow much deeper. A sense of camaraderie was forged through the fires of the battlefield!

There were corpses piled up like small hills everywhere around Nie Yan and the others.

“How many casualties did we suffer?” Nie Yan asked Tang Yao. He noticed a few of the corpses lying on the ground belonged to the members of Asskickers United. He couldn’t help but feel his heart ache a little.

“Of the 30,000 members that arrived here with me, around 2,300 died,” Tang Yao replied. He felt the outcome of this battle was extremely good. They hadn’t even lost 10% of their total forces.

Nie Yan genuinely didn’t expect the guild to gather so many players in such a short time. Even major guilds like Radiant Sacred Flame or Victorious Return didn’t have such frightening rallying power.

“When we return, everyone will be rewarded 100 merit points, and the brothers who died today will receive triple that amount.”

Tang Yao looked over the list of equipment picked up from the battle. “After returning all the equipment our brothers dropped, we still have over 8,000 pieces of equipment remaining. Many of them have great properties too. Our treasury is going to explode!” He finally understood why people in ancient times loved to go to

war. It was because the spoils of battle were great! It was the tactic of using battle to support battle. In a single battle, Asskickers United went from being nearly impoverished directly to being rich again! The guild's resources suddenly became ample!

“We're not finished yet. Holy Empire is currently in a battle with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. We have to hurry over; otherwise Holy Empire won't last much longer!” Nie Yan said, allowing the members who were low on health and mana to rest in preparation for the next battle.

After a while, seeing that almost all of the players had fully recovered, Nie Yan shouted, “Alright, everyone, get up! We're going to slaughter Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!”

Hearing Nie Yan's words, the players had blank looks on their face. They were going to directly clash with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame?

Not so long ago, Asskickers United was just a small guild while Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were frightening behemoths. Nearly half of all the players present were long-time members, and what they were proudest about was that they got to witness the incredible growth of the guild into a formidable powerhouse with their very own eyes. They received just as much respect, if not more than a player from any of the major guilds. This was because each of them was an elite selected out of the player base.

Not so long ago, Asskickers United suffered the suppression of Victorious Return. Even though there were countless casualties,



they didn't fight back, instead choosing to endure silently. It wasn't until the incident in Kiln Fire Woods where Nie Yan's group of ten humiliated Victorious Return and Unhindered that Asskickers United's prestige spread out to all corners of the Viridian Empire. That battle earned them much honour and glory. Today, yet another guild—Azure Falling Sky—suffered a crushing defeat at their hands, with them discovering that the opponent couldn't even withstand a single blow. Without anyone realizing, Asskickers United had grown into an unrivalled colossus!

Just a moment ago, when Nie Yan suddenly informed them they were going to slaughter Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, everyone felt like they were in a dream. Within just a few weeks' time, Asskickers United came to possess the strength to defeat these two major guilds!

However, at the same time, Nie Yan's words also filled their hearts with bravado!

“Damn! What's so amazing about Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!?”

“Yeah, let's massacre them!”

“Asskickers United is the best!”

The players from Asskickers United roared as their fighting spirits were ignited. After defeating Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, they could freely walk around Calore with their heads held high! And those Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred

Flame players who previously jeered at them would shirk away in shame!

They would let every player in Calore know the strength of Asskickers United!

Seeing the fiery appearances of these guild members, Nie Yan nodded in approval with a faint smile. With such a formidable drive to do battle, who would fear Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame? No matter how many players arrived from their side, Asskickers United would slaughter them all!

“Let’s go!”

The large crowd of players moved toward the border of Twilight Forest, brimming with the desire to wipe out their enemies.

## Chapter 231 – Taking Lives Like Reaping Wheat

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Sleepy Fox soon felt the overwhelming pressure of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame's relentless assault. Wave after wave of their players threw themselves at Holy Empire's defensive line as though there were no end to their numbers. Sleepy Fox could only look on helplessly as his people killed and killed only to see more opponents rushing forward.

“Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster! What the hell did those two maniacs promise their people? They're just lining up to throw their lives away!” Sleepy Fox cursed vehemently.

One section after the other fell as Holy Empire's defensive lines were overwhelmed by the crushing numbers.

Sleepy Fox immediately directed his reserve forces to fill in the gaps. With hundreds of players dying every minute, they were in drastic need of reinforcements. If Asskickers United's troops didn't arrive soon, Holy Empire would be wiped out.

Although their enemies' attacks were fierce, Holy Empire's players were also wantonly spilling blood. Disregarding the consequences, they stubbornly held their line as they fought back.

“Hmmpf! Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return aren't anything special after all. Even the two of them together can't take us out!”

“Boss, I’ve killed 23 of them! I must have earned my way into the Knight Regiment now!”

“Brothers, stay strong! Let’s send Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return home crying to their mommies! Let’s see if those cowards still dare to look down on our Holy Empire after today!”

The majority of the players in Holy Empire, Radiant Sacred Flame, Victorious Return, and even Asskickers United weren’t really irreconcilable with each other. In fact, quite a few of them secretly had friends in rival guilds. After all, each person was their own master, and none of them would be foolish enough to treat guild rivalries as private grudges. That didn’t take away from their pride in their guilds. These people would share both glory and shame with their guilds. If their guild was strong, they would naturally look good as well.

The area outside Twilight Forest had long since become a chaotic battlefield, and the scope of the conflict was still growing.

Holy Empire, having held on for so long, was just about to fall when Asskickers United troops arrived. They circled around their enemy before beginning to slaughter their way through the opponents’ eastern flank.

“Brothers, attack! Massacre Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return!”

The 30,000 Asskickers United players surged in like a mountain-

toppling tsunami, charging towards their enemies as howling war cries filled the skies.

The Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return players in the eastern portion of their army began feeling the ground beneath their feet rumble. Looking around suspiciously, they quickly noticed a dark swarm of Asskickers United players like ants on the horizon. Their expressions changed drastically as they saw the vast swathes of approaching foes. If those enemies charged straight over, they would be bearing the brunt of the attack!

“Tang Yao, don’t forget to have our Thieves focus on collecting dropped equipment,” Nie Yan specifically reminded Tang Yao of this important task.

“Don’t worry, I’ve already issued the orders, telling them not to miss a single piece.”

With Asskickers United’s current momentum, slaughtering their way through wouldn’t pose any difficulties at all. Just by charging straight forward, they could collect countless pieces of equipment from their fallen foes. This effect would only be accentuated by the fact that many Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return players were already branded with red names.

When a red-named player died and dropped all their equipment during a battle such as this one, their guild would usually provide a replacement set as well as hand out additional rewards to compensate for their losses.

Nie Yan thought sinisterly, Even if we can't deal crippling blows to Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return today, we'll bleed them out!

With a final round of excited roars that thundered ominously into their opponents' ears, Asskickers United's Warriors finally smashed into Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return's armies. Leading the charge were Fighters, among them Resplendent Bladelight and Yi Yan. Brandishing their massive swords, they slammed into their enemies and commenced the bloodbath.

The sky was filled with a holy brilliance, gently falling like spring rain from a cloud. The blessing increased their stats, allowing the 500 Warriors in the vanguard to fight as fiercely as a tiger.

“Damn, this is too awesome! What skill is this?”

“My Strength increased by 60 percent! I'm invincible!”

Most of these Warriors usually couldn't even deal 200 damage in a single hit. However, with these buffs, many of them had a chance to hit for over 300! With even the weaker ones chopping down people like cutting melons, there wasn't any need to discuss those who boasted high attack power even before the blessings.

With such range, this spell was obviously some form of advanced magic. Nie Yan's gaze scanned his guild's forces before landing on a white-robed Priest. His heart lurched as he recognized him. It's him!

Who else could it be other than Black Heaven? He appeared to be sincerely fulfilling Black Hell's agreement, integrating himself as a member of Asskickers United and participating in guild activities. He just displayed a Templar Magic from the Priest-class, Boon of Power.

Like a monstrous beast, Asskickers United's army ripped through Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return's front line. One after the other, groups began trying to retreat, only to find out they couldn't outrun the charge of the enemy Warriors.

"We're invincible!"

As the Asskickers United players once more let out roaring battle cries, their morale soared to an all new high. Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return's players were all struck by terror. Some of them even forgot to resist as Asskickers United made short work of those in their path.

"Kill!" Tang Yao repeatedly shot out tongues of flame, each flying towards an enemy with a bang. His high level coupled with his massive magic damage made it so that very few people could survive more than two hits from him.

Nie Yan single-handedly infiltrated the opposing army's rear, making a beeline for the Priests. His dagger never stopped moving as he efficiently exterminated any Priest in sight.

Nie Yan was like a god of death harvesting these Priests' souls.

His horrifying killing power left others traumatized.

Priests were the lifeline of a guild. With hundreds of Warriors and Mages in the surroundings, no one had a clue how Nie Yan had gotten to them.

In an instant, the spells of all the nearby Mages were focused on Nie Yan.

A barrage of magic landed on Nie Yan in succession, exploding on him and causing a stream of damage values to float into the air above him.

However, Nie Yan's level was too high. He was Level 35, while almost all of these players were around Level 25. Some were even lower. This was a level difference of over 10! Without Level Ignore of some kind, their damage would be extremely limited. Add this on top of the fact that he wore the Skywalker Set, which greatly boosted his survivability, their attacks could barely hit him for double digits.

However, under the concentrated attacks of so many players, Nie Yan's health rapidly drained to half. He drank an Intermediate Health Potion, which instantly brought his health bar back to full.

From his vantage point, Heaven Breaker noticed something was wrong. Unexpectedly, a Thief had snuck into the ranks of his Priests and had already killed almost thirty of them. Looking closely, he could see that it was his hated rival Nirvana Flame. He raged, "Skinny Dog! Go grab a squad of Thieves and destroy



Nirvana Flame! Mad Rogue, let's see just how mad you are!"

Several dozen Thieves dashed toward Nie Yan, brimming with killing intent.

Nie Yan killed another six Priests. Because he caused such havoc in the backline, the Priests were too anxious to properly heal. The frontline of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, which now lacked the support of the Priests, quickly collapsed. The Warriors of Asskickers United were bathed in holy light and advanced with great fervour.

The Thieves from Asskickers United finally arrived at the backline. One Strike Vow, Sun, and the others were present. As elites of the guild, their combat strength was extraordinary, and the Mages from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return immediately dropped like flies, causing the concentrated barrage of spells on Nie Yan to subside.

Nie Yan's lips curved into a cold smile when he noticed a familiar silhouette approaching under the cover of stealth.

The stealthed Skinny Dog, seeing Nie Yan's smirk, felt as if his heart was just smashed by a sledgehammer. His scalp tingled as he recalled the several times he had gone up against Nirvana Flame. He had come out on top a grand sum of zero times, resulting in a subconscious fear of Nie Yan despite the numerous Victorious Return elites he had by his side. He didn't have any sense of security, and his movements were slightly stiff as if his body had suddenly become powerless.

Turning his head, Nie Yan looked in Skinny Dog's direction, then locked onto his position whereupon his eyes blossomed out with a strange glow!

Eye of Truth!

A hazy silhouette entered Nie Yan's vision. He immediately activated Stealth, disappearing before the eyes of the surrounding players, and dashed toward Skinny Dog with his dagger raised.

Seeing Nie Yan's bloodshot eyes which resembled those of a demon, Skinny Dog grew extremely nervous. Before he could react, Nie Yan's figure disappeared right before his eyes, causing him to feel the blade of the reaper inching ever closer to his neck. Just as he tightly gripped his dagger, raising it in preparation to repel any oncoming attack, he felt a cold chill behind his neck. Before he could even react, it was already too late!

What terrifying speed!

Skinny Dog felt a sense of despairing helplessness in his heart. Nirvana Flame was an insurmountable wall! Even if he greatly improved in the future, he knew he could never defeat this opponent who had already thoroughly shattered his self-confidence.

Employing the Dance of Death, Nie Yan circled around Skinny Dog, who didn't even have a chance to react. He struck him in the back of his head with a precise hit, successfully inflicting a stun.

“Shit! Stop him!” one of the nearby Thieves shouted as he saw Skinny Dog being stunned. He lunged forward.

Before any of the Thieves could reach him, Nie Yan struck out with a Backstab, and then swept the blade of his other dagger across Skinny Dog’s neck, dying the ground red.

Skinny Dog collapsed onto the ground.

Nie Yan, using Shadow Waltz, disappeared from the Thieves’ sights.

When the Thieves finally arrived, the area was already empty. Nie Yan was nowhere in sight. They stared at each other, feeling the blood in their veins turn to ice. Only now did they comprehend why everyone online called Nie Yan the Mad Rogue. He was truly deserving of this title! They didn’t even hold a candle to him!

A group of almost three hundred Priests had just been annihilated by Nie Yan before they could even respond. By the time Sun and the others had gotten there, there were only corpses left on the ground. Asskickers United’s Warriors quickly pushed their frontline over as well, taking out a large swath of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return’s players in one fell swoop.

Tang Yao looked at the counts provided by his people, his eyebrows dancing in delight. As Asskickers United’s frontline pushed forward, the Thieves in the back picked up over 8,000 pieces of equipment. Even after returning the equipment dropped

by Asskickers United players, they still gathered almost 6,000 pieces of equipment.

## Chapter 232 – Fleeing After Making A Killing

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Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame suffered over 8,000 casualties, while Asskickers United only lost around 2,000. Just based on the number of losses, it was crystal clear which was the superior force.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were progressively beaten back. Several of their players attempted to cast advanced magic, but all of them were interrupted mid-cast. In this sort of chaotic clash, unless the person was protected by numerous powerful individuals, it truly wasn't easy to use spells with such long cast-times.

So long as Nie Yan remained on the battlefield, no Mage from Victorious Return or Radiant Sacred Flame would be allowed to cast advanced magic. Before they could finish chanting a set of syllables, he would've already materialized behind them. After all, the fluctuation of magical energy given off by advanced magic being cast was extremely distinct. Unless the caster possessed something like a Legendary-grade Illusion Ring, these fluctuations were nigh impossible to conceal. Combined with the fact that all advanced magic had base cast times of at least 20–30 seconds—requiring two to three sets of incantation syllables and gestures or more—he had ample time to stop them from being cast.

This was one of the reasons why Magisters were so afraid of Shadow Dancers in the previous timeline. These players who could vanish and reappear unpredictably would frequently interrupt

them while in the middle of casting advanced magic. No matter how many Warriors, Paladins, and Priests a Magister had by their side, Shadow Dancers were impossible to defend against assuredly. Not only this, but after a Shadow Dancer got off an ambush, they could immediately retreat, and no one could stop them. Just like that, a Magic Talisman which took an hour or more to inscribe would completely go to waste.

Under the leadership of Nie Yan and the others, the players from Asskickers United were bursting with morale. With unstoppable momentum, they routed the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, causing the spectating Holy Empire players to be left speechless. Asskickers United's advancing speed was too frightening. They were like bulldozers plowing through enemy lines.

As long as an army was well-coordinated, even defeating a rival army several times their size wouldn't be anything difficult. Whether in terms of individual player strength or synergy between players, Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame fell far short of Asskickers United.

"Damn! Are these guys on steroids!?" a Holy Empire player exclaimed. He could only use these sort of words to describe how he felt right now. The players from Asskickers United were valiant beyond compare. This fighting spirit was too overwhelming!

Seeing that Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were retreating, Asskickers United's players displayed even more might and mettle as they ruthlessly pursued the enemy.

Half an hour later, Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame lost over 10,000 players, while Asskickers United only lost around 4,000. Even Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster couldn't help but gasp in alarm at the frightening fighting strength of their opponent.

「Boss! We can't hold them off any longer!」

「We can't either!」

「What the hell are you all shaking in your boots for!? In ten minutes, 100,000 players will arrive to reinforce us! Do you really think we'll lose to these bastards?」Heaven Breaker loudly berated.

Both Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster found themselves being overwhelmed by the players of Asskickers United, so they had no choice but to call in reinforcements from the outside. The two major guilds could rally an earthshaking force.

「You guys sure are fierce. The 30,000 players of your guild are beating 60,000 players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return so badly they can barely fight back,」Sleepy Fox whispered to Nie Yan through chat. If the people under him were even half as valiant as the players from Asskickers United, he would be satisfied.

「Over 100,000 players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame have set out toward our location. What do we do?」Nie Yan had just received word from Guo Huai. Only Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame could mobilize so many people.

「I just summoned over 30,000 players from my side, and Sapphire Shrine is arriving with over 50,000 players. What's there to be afraid of!? They want to duke it out? We'll duke it out with them!」Sleepy Fox was full of hot blooded vigour. Looking at the current progress of the battle, he believed they had a good chance of obtaining a complete victory over Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

「Are you sure Sapphire Shrine will help us?」Nie Yan asked. He remained cool-headed. If Sapphire Shrine continued to be indecisive, it would have a huge impact on the outcome of this battle.

「With a cunning old fox like Fa Lan, it really is hard to say. Knowing him, he won't enter a conflict so easily.」Sleepy Fox calmed down somewhat. Sapphire Shrine was most likely just putting on a show of force in an attempt to deter Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. Fa Lan's position was still unclear. If a full-blown war broke out and Sapphire Shrine remained on the sidelines, the final outcome for Holy Empire and Asskickers United would be disastrous.

「I say we forget it this time. There's too much risk involved. We should engineer a plan to have Sapphire Shrine fall out with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame some other time. Make it so that old fox will have no choice but to stand on our side,」Nie Yan said. He couldn't help but act with caution. At least for now, Fa Lan wasn't a reliable ally because they had nothing important enough to fully bind Sapphire Shrine to their side.



Listening to these words, Sleepy Fox could only stay silent. Nie Yan was too sinister. However, that really was the best method to deal with a cunning old fox like Fa Lan.

「What do we do now?」

「Wait for us to finish off this final batch of players. We'll retreat into Twilight Forest,」Nie Yan said. So long as Asskickers United retreated into the forest, the outcome of this battle would no longer be settled just because the other side possessed more numbers.

「That's fine, but hurry up. Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return's reinforcements are about to arrive. Be careful when you're retreating and—」Just as Sleepy Fox wanted to warn Nie Yan not to let the enemy take advantage of them while they retreated, something unimaginable occurred before his eyes.

The Warriors from Asskickers United halted their pursuit and started retreating, leaving the players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return stunned and wondering why their enemy suddenly stopped the chase. Before any of them could react to what just transpired, countless area-of-effect spells rained down from the sky between the two forces. After which the players from Asskickers United retreated to the forest like a rapidly receding tide.

Coming and going like the wind!

Some players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return

wanted to pursue. But none of them dared to approach the curtain of destructive magic; to go up meant facing certain death. Not to mention many of them were cowed after receiving such a severe beating. They were fleeing with all their might just a moment ago. Who among them were willing to give chase knowing full well they would only be throwing their lives away?

They just stood there with vacant looks on their faces. By the time the shower of area-of-effect magic subsided, the players from Asskickers United had already retreated over 20 meters away.

「Chase them!」Heaven Breaker shouted through the voice chat. If he allowed Asskickers United to get away just like that, wouldn't all of his efforts have gone to waste, to say nothing of the over 100,000 players already on the way here? So long as he stalled them until reinforcements arrived, they would definitely be crushed beneath his feat!

The players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame rushed forward, but the enemy had already long retreated into the forest. The members of Asskickers United weren't disorganized like those from other guilds. Under the coordination of every squad leader, they were completely in sync.

They set up solid defensive lines along the forest edge in preparation to repel the forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, while the remaining players dispersed into the forest.

Heaven Breaker was fuming with anger. They suffered such a great loss at the hands of Asskickers United. Because their

frontlines were constantly forced back throughout the battle, they weren't able to retrieve any of the equipment dropped; the enemy pocketed every last piece of it! Now, after not suffering any real damage, they retreated just like that? How could he not feel infuriated!?

Nightbreak Trickster quickly prevented Heaven Breaker from doing anything rash. "If we chase after them in the forest, we definitely won't be their match!" He noticed early on that the players on the opposing side were far stronger than his own. The stark difference in ability left him shocked. Just where did Asskickers United find so many talented individuals? He knew when to advance, and when to retreat. If they entered the forest, they would assuredly suffer even more severe losses!

"We're going to let them go...? Just like that?" Heaven Breaker sounded a little unwilling. He experienced the bitter taste of defeat yet again at the hands of Asskickers United.

"What else can we do? Do you want us to charge into Twilight Forest?" Nightbreak Trickster rebuked. He was clearly aware of the immense risks of such a foolish act. Who knew how many more men they would lose?

After cooling his head, Heaven Breaker also understood such a charge would end up disastrously. If they had successfully held up Asskickers United until reinforcements arrived, there was a good chance of defeating them by relying on the superiority in numbers. However, now that they had retreated into the forest, let alone defeating them, even catching them would be as hard as scaling the heavens. Do not rashly enter the forest for there are hidden

dangers lurking everywhere. He still understood this most basic reasoning.

“Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine have gathered almost 80,000 players. If we enter the forest, those forces will move to surround us,” Nightbreak Trickers said. If Sapphire Shrine entered this conflict, the outcome would be hard to predict. If they won, they would gain success overnight. If they lost, they would be pushed to the brink of hopelessness. No one would dare to brave such risk. It was better to just forget it, take the loss, and withdraw for the time being.

“Sapphire Shrine hasn’t joined their side, has it?” Heaven Breaker knitted his brows and asked in a gloomy tone.

“That’s hard to say. After all, that old bastard Fa Lan did interfere during the incident outside of Black Flame Forest.”

Heaven Breaker angrily gnashed his teeth. He could only silently accept Nightbreak Tricker’s decision as he ordered his forces to withdraw.

“Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame are leaving,” Sleepy Fox said as the tense look on his face finally relaxed. He never expected Asskickers United to be able to get away so cleanly from such a chaotic melee. Using the cover of magic to quickly withdraw from a battle, this method was worth borrowing for himself. However, this sort of thing could only be pulled off when your own side held the advantage; otherwise, if your frontline was constantly being pushed back, the Mages in your backline would never get the opportunity to cast their area-of-effect spells.

Nie Yan also heaved a sigh of relief. This time, they had lost over 5,000 players but killed over 18,000 players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. All the dropped equipment also went to his side. He dealt the enemy a small blow while also earning a significant profit. Most importantly, though, this conflict greatly boosted the morale of his guild. Many guild brothers were still stirring with excitement from their most recent victory.

“How come they’re retreating so quickly? I still want to kill more of them!”

“Right! We got to kill those Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return bastards to our heart’s content. Many of them didn’t even dare to fight back. All they did was run. I killed six of them!”

“I killed three. The Warriors on the frontlines killed the most. Some people even broke past a hundred!”

These players discussed with great fervour. Listening to their conversations, Nie Yan couldn’t help but smile. When they were fighting it out with Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, he’d held a bit of worry in his heart. However, after they won, that worry completely disappeared.

# Chapter 233 – Snatching Food From The Tiger’s Den

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“Now, having finally seen what Asskickers United is capable of,” Sleepy Fox admitted, “I really did underestimate your guild. I’m sure that Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame have realized that too, but it’s too late for anything now.”

Videos of today’s battle would spread far and wide, marking the start of Asskickers United’s path to the top. The rankings of the major guilds would begin to reorder itself as this battle brought Asskickers United to new heights.

Contrary to expectations, however, Nie Yan didn’t appear to be quite that excited. He replied simply, “Asskickers United merely took a tiny step forward. For entities the size of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, they can just dismiss these losses with a shrug.” Asskickers United’s victory in this battle would also greatly influence Azure Falling Sky to ally with those two massive guilds, adding one more sizable opponent to his list of enemies. Due to that, there was a certain downside to this victory as well.

“From this day onwards, we’ll be in the same boat. I hope the best for our future,” said Sleepy Fox, his arm extended. The fates of Holy Empire and Asskickers United were now intertwined—any glory would be shared, and similarly, any adversities would be weathered through together.

“Likewise.” Nie Yan reached for Sleepy Fox’s hand and shook on

it. Holy Empire had expressed their sincere wish for cooperation by genuinely following through with the mutual defense pact. They alone had held off Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame long enough for Asskickers United to demolish Azure Falling Sky. It now went without saying that Nie Yan had to return the favour—he would help Holy Empire in taking down the stronghold, and by then, both guilds would have truly shared both adversities, and glory.

“Well, I’ve gotta go and take care of some guild matters. Unlike you, I can’t just sit back and relax as guild leader,” said Sleepy Fox, his eyes narrowed slightly.

“Take care.” Nie Yan smiled.

Sleepy Fox finished up with Nie Yan and left to arrange plans to deal with the remnants of the guild battle. The aftermath left him with many red-named guild members, so the first order of business was to clear those. As for the players that had died, they, too, would require some sort of reimbursement. The crowd could only be appeased with absolute fairness in treatment.

「First, let’s get our red-named brothers cleaned up, then we’ll head back and discuss contributions,」 Nie Yan said in the voice chat. There was certainly no shortage of rewards after this battle.

The chat exploded in cheers; they had undoubtedly long awaited that announcement and now, they were calculating how many merit points they would each receive. By the guild’s set of agreements, each kill in a guild battle would net the player 30 to 300 merit points, determined by their class. For instance, Priests

received 200 merit points on the spot, and more depending on the part they played in the battle. There was also compensation for those who had died in battle, as it would have resulted in a loss in level and gear. The ones in the top earnings bracket could even receive several thousand merit points!

Nie Yan formed a few groups of guild members without red names, and had them escort their red-named brethren over to hunting zones suitable for clearing red names. The rest returned to the city.

Nie Yan threw all the equipment taken from the players of Azure Falling Sky, Victorious Return, and Radiant Sacred Flame into the guild treasury, then had Guo Huai distribute merit points. Several million points were soon appropriately allocated to the players, who began divvying up the equipment in the treasury based on what they needed. Before long, over 15,000 pieces of equipment were swept clean from the treasury and equipped by the players, significantly boosting the quality of their gear.

Not only had Asskickers United avoided enormous damage in this battle, it had even brought tremendous growth for itself. The practice of increasing battle strength by undergoing battle had been extremely effective this time around.

“Profit!” Tang Yao exclaimed. This time, all members of Asskickers United experienced the sweet taste of victory. Although the battle was long over, the entire guild was still in a state of ecstasy.

“Have them quiet down a bit and stay alert,” Nie Yan said to Guo



Huai, knitting his brows. It was very dangerous if the entire guild submerged itself in an overly conceited atmosphere; after all, the battle was far from over.

There were many guild matters that had to be taken care of. Nie Yan handed off as much work as he could to others to deal with, but even if internal guild affairs were completely dealt with, he still had plenty of matters to attend to: bringing some guild members to level in Everlasting City, searching for the Chapter of Virtue, and completing the quest that required the Steal skill.

“Nie Yan, I’ve heard that the bidding for a bunch of places like NPC potion shops and auction houses has already started online. Here, take a look,” Guo Huai said. Unfortunately, he was just a bit over Level 10, so he wasn’t able to help much during the battle and could only worry on the sidelines. When Nie Yan and his army behind returned in full victory, he breathed a huge sigh of relief and went straight to work. The spoils of this battle also resolved the guild treasury’s desperate empty state: save for a few pieces of Level 30 equipment held for raising funds, the treasury was bare of any low-level equipment.

“The auction started a few days earlier than I expected. How much gold do we have?” Nie Yan asked. He hadn’t been paying too much attention to the guild’s treasury, and it did seem to be about that time when the auction began to put up virtual assets for sale. He needed enough gold to have a chance of purchasing the auction house in the heart of Calore!

“We’ve accumulated over 3,000 gold.”

“We got more than I expected,” Nie Yan said. With over 3,000 gold, securing the auction house at the heart of Calore wouldn’t be a problem. He opened up the page of the official Conviction website. The bids for virtual properties in various major cities began showing up.

Nie Yan looked over the list of properties available for auction in Calore—around 30 or so altogether. They included the auction house at the center of Calore, the Mercenary Auction House, the auction house at the south side of the city, the Kelis Potion Shop, the Ever Grand Smithy, and so on. Players were already making their bids. The most expensive property listed was the auction house at the center of Calore. Its current bid was already just over 1,200 gold. The minimum increment a bid could be raised by was 100 gold. If no one bid on a property for five hours, it would go to the highest bidder. The duration of the virtual property auction was three days.

With virtual properties starting to go up for auction, the major guilds and large gaming organizations would immediately be interested. They would quickly begin to amass money to fight for the various properties. However, trying to collect money on such short notice would obviously be less effective. Because of the sky-high prices, no matter how much money they gathered, it still wouldn’t be enough.

In the previous timeline, the auction house at the center of Calore was sold for 2,300 gold. The bidding had lasted all the way to the final second of the auction. According to rumours, many large financial groups had amassed large funds to snatch the auction house at the center of Calore. However, 2,300 gold truly wasn’t a small sum. Even if you sold all the belongings of every

single player in a major guild, you would barely be able to scrape up that amount.

Nie Yan considered his options, thinking that if he greatly increased the bid right now, even the richest players wouldn't be able to gather so much money within five hours and would just give up on Calore's main auction house.

"1,700 gold!" Nie Yan raised the bid. His extremely fierce bidding gave many people a huge fright. The bid for the auction house at the center of Calore skyrocketed! This new development caused several financial groups to give up on the bidding for the auction house, setting their sights elsewhere.

Nie Yan hoped that no other financial groups would raise the bid within the next five hours.

He checked the other properties. Most of the other auction houses had a current bid of 700–800 gold. Several had their bids break past 1,000 gold. Because auction houses were guaranteed to be the most profitable industry in the future, many people wanted to snatch one up so they could have a share of the pie.

After this auction ended, the several tycoons of the Viridian Empire would be determined. The first was Cao Xu. In the previous timeline, he had gathered up funds from five large guilds, wantonly converted real life money to gold, and bought several dozen virtual properties to cement his position as an overlord in the game.

The Tuoba Family Financial Group was another. Outside of Withered Leaf, they pooled together gold from the three large guilds they controlled to purchase six golden properties in Brightmoon City, Nisode City, and so on.

There had also been over a dozen financial bigwigs dividing the properties between themselves. By the time they were done, smaller groups could only fight for their leftovers. For example, people like Sleepy Fox, Kill Love, and Fa Lan would be lucky just to get a property or two.

The circumstances in this timeline were a little different from the previous one. Since Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had suffered some heavy setbacks, they would have to spend a lot of gold to compensate the losses of their players. Most likely in the short term, they wouldn't be able to raise much money.

As for Nie Yan, he would definitely snatch up one or two properties in this auction, particularly the auction house at the center of Calore. This was the most profitable auction house in the entire Viridian Empire! He had to have it!

He contemplated for a moment. He might just be able to snatch another property with the leftover gold from buying the auction house at the center of Calore, the gold from the Starry Night Potion Shop, and the gold from the Union of Assassins.

Nie Yan walked to the Starry Night Potion Shop to check how much gold had accumulated. Bird Leaves No Eggs, according to Nie Yan's instructions, had saved up the profits from the last few days. Seeing over 1,600 gold in the till, Nie Yan was surprised at how

much there was. Added to the several hundred he could retrieve from the Union of Assassins, this would be enough to purchase a second property.

Nie Yan had his eyes set on another auction house in Calore, the Mercenary Auction House! In the future, it would also be a gold mine, one of the most popular auction houses in Calore. In the previous timeline, it had auctioned off for 1,900 gold. If he could successfully purchase it, he would be extremely content.

Nie Yan withdrew all the gold from the Starry Night Potion Shop and the Union of Assassins and deposited it into his personal storage. He paid close attention to any changes in the current bids of the various virtual properties up for auction online, with him mostly eying the auction house at center of Calore and the Mercenary Auction House. For the time being, no one came out to compete with him.

With the virtual property auction pushed forward unexpectedly, Nie Yan could only postpone his previous plan to take people powerleveling in Everlasting City. At this time, every bit of gold could mean the difference between success and failure in the auction. He couldn't afford to use any right now.

Thinking things over, Nie Yan decided the guild didn't really need him, with Guo Huai in charge. Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were unlikely to make any big movements right now. He should set his sights on the Chapter of Virtue first and complete Volume I of the Book of Order. If he got that over with, he wouldn't need to worry about his chapters dropping if he died in a guild war.

## Chapter 234 – Tuoba Family Head

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Nie Yan stocked up on some consumables while still in Calore, taking whatever potions that he thought might come in handy from the Starry Night Potion Shop. Items that players couldn't bear to use under normal circumstances were all stuffed into his bags.

Walking out of the Starry Night Potion, Nie Yan headed over to the Jewelcrafter, where he socketed the Skywalker Set with Defense Gems before upgrading it to +5.

Nie Yan wrapped up his preparations and was about to set out for the transfer area when he received a call from Aqua Smoke Stub. 「About today's matter, I'd like you to thank all the brothers in the guild on my behalf. If not for your help, Withered Leaf would've been wiped out in Twilight Forest, and it would've been even more difficult to give my boss an explanation.」

Nie Yan chuckled lightly. 「You've already thanked those who should be thanked.」

「My withdrawing of Withered Leaf without giving any prior notice was indeed a bit rude as well as unprofessional. I still have some matters to sort out, so returning today is probably out of the question. But I can promise we'll be back in Asskickers United by tommorow at the latest.」

「No problem. I'm sure everyone over here will be happy to welcome you guys back. The entrance to the guild headquarters is

always open to you.」Nie Yan found Smoke Stub speaking in such a solemn tone a bit odd but nothing too concerning. Having weathered through this storm, he felt confident Withered Leaf would never betray Asskickers United.

Nie Yan chatted with Smoke Stub for a while longer before hanging up. After arriving at the transfer area, he stepped onto the transfer point and teleported to Sonia Town where he departed from the north gate.

A dim glow blanketed the Sonia Moonlit Woodland. It was the former homeland of the white elves which later became the territory of the humans. Although its original inhabitants had migrated long ago, traces of their civilization could still be found if one looked hard enough. It was now home to wild beasts, such as the Moon Bear, which were all Level 35 monsters.

The magical energy enveloping the Moonlit Woodland was much denser than on the outside, so Mages levelling here would receive a 30% boost to their magic power. Of course, the creatures that inhabited such an environment would similarly possess formidable magic capabilities as well. Even at Level 35, those who could level here were limited to only the strong, top-class players.

After going through several major battles, Nie Yan grew all the more aware of the importance of gear quality. Although his Skywalker Set and Splitting Edge were still passable, the rest of his equipment could only be plainly described as mediocre. With his status as the guild leader of Asskickers United, it was indeed a bit shameful if everything he wore wasn't the best.

However, to piece together a full set of godly equipment which could be worn even at end-game was truly no simple task!

One step at a time, I suppose... Nie Yan helplessly shook his head.

Everything would start from completing the first volume of the Book of Order!

Nie Yan entered the woodland where he spotted the silhouettes of several Moon Bears roaming between the trees. They were particularly tough to deal with when they were allowed to buff themselves. Even though he was strong enough to deal with several at once, he'd rather not waste his time.

He activated Stealth before heading straight for the heart of the Moonlit Woodland.

Nie Yan spotted all sorts of magical plants growing in his surroundings, but unfortunately, the rank of his Gatherer skill was nowhere near high enough to harvest them.

He flitted past one Moon Bear after another. They were giant white bears with distinct blue moon and star patterns covering their chests. Possessing naturally robust, towering frames, they emanated an aura of unrivalled strength.

Moon Bear: Level 35



The most powerful tool at a Moon Bear's disposal was Seismic Slam, a knockback skill which stunned the opponent. Very few Warriors would dare to confront them head-on without the support of a Priest.

Nie Yan followed the ancient trails left behind by the white elves as he travelled further into the woodland. He could practically feel the Chapter of Virtue beckoning to him. Of course, this was simply all in his head, but he couldn't help but get excited with the final chapter from the Book of Order almost within reach.

...

Holy Faith Cathedral, a place of worship where some residents of Calore would often go to pray.

Aqua Smoke Stub, clad in the War God's Doctrine Set, arrived outside of the cathedral's entrance. Stepping through the doorway, his gaze swept over everyone in the hall before finally falling on a player seated among the dense rows. He was dressed in adorned white robes with the appearance of a middle-aged man in his 50s. Though he was somewhat getting on in his years, he was still healthy and full of vigor.

"Boss," Smoke Stub greeted. Because of the contract between them, even someone as prideful as him had no choice but to lower his head in front of this person.

This man was the head of the Tuoba household, a legendary figure. He alone brought the family to the peak by establishing the Tuoba Family Dynasty.

“Good, you’ve arrived. I heard you took everyone in Withered Leaf with you to confront Azure Falling Sky. Do you know the consequences of your actions?” Tuoba Hongye’s dignified voice carried a trace of anger.

“I do.”

“Then, tell me, why did you still do it?”

“I had to... for the sake of all the brothers in the guild! Although how this matter developed was outside of my expectations...” Smoke Stub wore a resolute expression as he stared at Tuoba Hongye.

“You must remember that Withered Leaf is a business. And the sole purpose of a business is to earn money, not engaging in feuds left and right.” Tuoba Hongye coldly stared at Smoke Stub. Out of all his subordinates, only Smoke Stub dared to show him such attitude. That proud, unyielding look really aggravated him.

“You’re right, the sole purpose of Withered Leaf is to earn a profit. But the people there aren’t your money-making machines! Nor do I have to remind you of the fact that all the members of Withered Leaf are free after fulfilling their obligations!” Smoke Stub replied in a solemn tone.

“Hmph! Your behaviour negatively influences the operations of Withered Leaf. I have the right to manage an organization I own. Also, since you’ve already withdrawn from Asskickers United, don’t bother returning. I recently signed a cooperation agreement with the Cao Xu Century Financial Group. Withered Leaf will be entering Victorious Return for the contracted period of time,” Tuoba Hongye informed. He had attempted countless times but always failed to rein in Smoke Stub’s prideful nature.

“Why? We’ve signed a contract with Asskickers United. We’ll incur severe penalties if we violate it!” Smoke Stub asked in shock. Tuoba Hongye wanted Withered Leaf to betray Asskickers United for Victorious Return? He would never allow such a thing!

“The Cao Xu Century Financial Group is willing to pay the penalty fee. Withered Leaf will be joining Victorious Return first thing tomorrow. This is related to the Tuoba Family’s interests,” Tuoba Hongye curtly replied, leaving no room for questions.

“I will not withdraw from Asskickers United, nor will I join Victorious Return! Asskickers United saved the brothers of Withered Leaf today. I, Aqua Smoke Stub, will never let down a friend!” Smoke Stub stubbornly declared. Before arriving at this meeting, he mentally prepared himself to receive Tuoba Hongye’s thundering fury, but he never expected that he would be ordered to join Victorious Return. This development caught him off guard.

“You want to go against my orders? Don’t forget your position!” Tuoba Hongye’s eyes narrowed. Smoke Stub was nothing more than one of the countless employees under the Tuoba Family

Financial Group. How dare he talk back in such a manner!?

“I solemnly declare that even if it means quitting Withered Leaf, I will never let down a friend!” Smoke Stub said unwaveringly. If he abandoned Asskickers United to join Victorious Return right now, what kind of person would he be!?

“According to our contract, if you quit Withered Leaf within a ten-year period, you’ll have to pay an early termination fee of ¥50,000,000. I reckon all the money you’ve painstakingly earned over the last five or so years only amounts to that much. And don’t forget. Without the protection of the Tuoba Family, do you think you can continue working as you are?” Tuoba Hongye sneered. Letting Withered Leaf join Victorious Return concerned a cooperative relationship between the Tuoba Family and the Cao Xu Century Financial Group. Smoke Stub couldn’t refuse even if he wished to!

“If that’s the case, I can only choose to withdraw from Withered Leaf. From now on, I have nothing to do with the organization! The ¥50,000,000 fee I owe will be paid in full. Tuoba Hongye, even if you take away everything I have, I will never betray a friend’s trust!” Smoke Stub’s eyes flashed with a cold light as though he were a man-eating beast.

“You ungrateful bastard! Scram from my sight!” Tuoba Hongye roared in anger. He refused to believe for a second that Smoke Stub could still get by after leaving Withered Leaf!

Smoke Stub no longer paid attention to Tuoba Hongye who was hurling out an unending barrage of abuse. As he made his way to

the door, he softly said, “No need to remind me. I’ll be returning this War God’s Doctrine Set to Withered Leaf!”

Stepping out of the Holy Faith Cathedral, Smoke Stub raised his head to look up at the sky and revealed a genuine, childlike smile. It felt truly freeing to be unshackled from such a heavy burden. Even though he lost six years’ worth of savings... good or bad, that was the price he paid for freedom. Besides, he felt the idea of operating as a free agent didn’t sound so bad.

Since he was going to be departing from Withered Leaf, Smoke Stub genuinely hoped that every single one of his brothers would go on to lead fruitful careers.

Smoke Stub glanced at the Withered Leaf group chat. The brothers there were still excitedly discussing today’s events. They were looking forward to returning to Asskickers United.

He really didn’t wish to rain on their parade by being the bearer of bad news, but he had no choice but to inform everyone of the latest development.「I’m sorry, guys... Withered Leaf won’t be returning to Asskickers United. Tuoba Hongye just decided that the organization will be joining Victorious Return first thing tomorrow!」

Smoke Stub’s words was akin to a stone evoking a thousand waves, giving rise to the displeasure of these brothers.

「Boss! Join Victorious Return? How can we do that!?!」Cold Peak cried out.

「Right! We'll really be letting down the brothers in Asskickers United by doing this!」Wood Grace chimed in.

All the other Withered Leaf players immediately echoed Cold Peak and Wood Grace's words.

「The Tuoba Family is working together with the Cao Xu Century Financial Group. One of the conditions is that Withered Leaf joins Victorious Return. I, Aqua Smoke Stub, will never let down any brother, including those in Asskickers United. Because of this, I've decided to quit Withered Leaf. So, everyone, this is goodbye. I wish you all the best as well as a bright future,」Smoke Stub said. Although he spoke in a calm tone, to the players of Withered Leaf, these words rang like thunder in their ears.

「Boss! Have you gone mad!? Aren't you afraid of the penalty fee? You'll have to fork over ¥50,000,000. That's almost six years' worth of income!」Cold Peak asked in shock.

「It's just money, that's all. What's there to be afraid of? As long as I have both my hands and feet, I'll never starve to death!」Smoke Stub let out a light-hearted laugh. He had come to accept that he could only keep moving forward.

## Chapter 235 – Weary Dragon Soaring To The Heavens!

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「Boss, have you thought this through properly? Without the Tuoba Family's protection, do you think Clear Sky is just going to let you be?」Cold Peak asked worriedly. Those who had split from Azure Falling Sky knew exactly what kind of person Clear Sky was.

「I've already made up my mind. I definitely cannot stay here anymore. I'll just hide somewhere down South,」Aqua Smoke Stub confirmed. He refused to believe that Clear Sky could track him down after he moved.

「With the boss gone, what's the point of staying here? I'm also leaving Withered Leaf! Hmph! I'm through working here as well.」Cold Peak had followed Smoke Stub out of Azure Falling Sky. Both of them had endured the same persecution and exploitation over the last six years, and had formed a completely unshakeable friendship.

「I'm done too! Isn't it just a measly early termination fee? I've long since saved up enough to pay for it. If not for the boss, I would've left Withered Leaf long ago!」Wood Grace agreed.

「I'll leave as well,」Samsara Lord echoed.

「Me too!」

A bunch of Withered Leaf players immediately joined the tide of

leaving members, speaking up one after another to declare their position. Many of them were also from the original group that split off from Azure Falling Sky together.

To Smoke Stub's surprise, over a hundred of his five hundred plus brothers in Withered Leaf wanted to quit with him. What's more, most of the others were only staying because they couldn't afford the sky-high penalty fee.

「Cold Peak! And you, Wood Grace! The hell are you doing? Both of you are already breadwinners for your families, so how could you have a tantrum like a little kid?」Smoke Stub scolded. It was already painful enough for him to leave Withered Leaf. He didn't want his brothers to go through the same troubles. Leaving the organization was a personal matter that he didn't want to drag others into.

「This isn't a tantrum! Boss, do you remember what you told us as we left Azure Falling Sky together? You said we'd start over from scratch, and that people can lack money but not ambition. You promised that even if you had just a single bite of food, you would never let us brothers go without. Do you remember how hard it was when you first founded Withered Leaf? We had absolutely zero business, and could only rely on selling equipment online. We were on our own every step of the way. Also, we got regular threats from Clear Sky, and our headquarters even got smashed multiple times! Despite all that, we still pulled through, didn't we? Everyone had to go through terrible struggles before we got to where we are today. Now that everyone has their share of riches and glory, almost everyone has saved up a million yuan. Some of us have even have ten million to our names! Why can't you let us share some of your burdens again? You insult us! You think that



you can just leave Withered Leaf without us brothers following you?」Cold Peak said resolutely. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Was it even possible to count all the things Smoke Stub had done for them back when they were still struggling? They all knew just how much they owed him. A person mustn't forget their roots!

「Cold Peak is right. Even if we end up as beggars, so what? So what if we end up being cleaned out of house or home? Haven't we worked our way up from nothing once already? As long as we're together, we can just do it again! How much money have we tirelessly earned for Tuoba Hongye over the years? Did he even consider our thoughts before telling us to leave Asskickers United for Victorious Return? Props to him for having the face to say such a thing, but returning kindness with evil? That's just petty!」Wood Grace spat.

「He's right, boss! You promised never to let us down, but isn't telling us to stay in Withered Leaf the same as telling us to become petty villains?」Cold Peak added.

「Think of your wife, your children! Do you really want to drag them down with you on this thorny path?」Smoke Stub was touched by the words of Cold Peak and Wood Grace. But to quit Withered Leaf was a major decision, one that shouldn't be made so hastily!

「Standing firm in the face of adversity is good fortune for the family. Only by weathering the storm together will we truly learn to treasure what we have and each other.」

「We only have one boss, and that's you. If you withdraw from

Withered Leaf, what is to become of us?」

「Yeah, boss!」

「Screw this! I'll go get a loan from the bank to pay this fee. I refuse to believe that I can't pay it off as a professional gamer. Plus, there's always the option of taking missions as an agent for the Union of Assassins.」

As he listened to his brothers speak, Smoke Stub's nose became stuffy and his eyes glistened with moisture.

「Boss, just say the word. Us brothers are here. Even if we leave Withered Leaf, we could just start Red Leaf or Purple Leaf or something. After quitting Azure Falling Sky, we vowed to brave the storms, side by side! After sharing great fortune, we naturally have to share such hardships as well. No matter how hard it is, we still have each other!」Cold Peak shouted desperately, worried by the lack of response from Smoke Stub.

「Yeah boss, money can always be made but a person cannot lack camaraderie. Wherever you go, we will definitely follow. As long as you don't think we're holding you back, we will follow!」Wood Grace proclaimed as well. With their group's strength, so long as Smoke Stub didn't lose hope, it wouldn't be a problem to once more rise from the ashes. Even if they never regained the splendor of their peak, they would each be able to scrape together a living. However, from Smoke Stub's current expression, Wood Grace couldn't tell if his boss still had the old resolve.

Smoke Stub's heart trembled. He took a deep breath to steady himself before announcing,「I, Aqua Smoke Stub, feel that just having you guys as my brothers makes everything we've gone through worth it. If any of you wish to follow me, the promise is still the same: as long as I have just a single bite of food, I will never let you go without!」

「Boss, with these words of yours, we can finally feel confident. With the skills of our group, there's absolutely no fear of failing to earn food and board for ourselves,」Cold Peak answered emotionally. Having heard those words, his eyes teared up as he realized he was once more looking at the same valiant boss who'd quit Azure Falling Sky in disgust all those years ago.

「My most cherished memories are of the times when we brothers had nothing to our names, just trying to get us from one day to the next. Those were the good old days, when instant ramen was a rare delicacy to us. Now that we all have loads of money, I'm actually not enjoying myself as much since we rarely get trouble thrown our way. Recently, life's been boring without any real struggle. Quitting Withered Leaf could let us go back to those days,」Wood Grace chimed in after a moment of sorrowful reminiscence.

This bunch of old brothers hadn't changed a whit. Since they were still standing strong, how could he, Aqua Smoke Stub, back down now?

「Those of you planning to leave with me, first return your equipment to Withered Leaf and then gather at the Calore transfer point. Then, leave Withered Leaf and we'll head south tomorrow.」Suddenly, Smoke Stub felt a moment of *deja vu*. He could see

himself saying much the same all those years ago when he'd first quit Azure Falling Sky to start up Withered Leaf.

「Boss, you guys will go first. I still have some difficulties of my own. I'm afraid it'll be quite some time before I can join you.」Some of these players' families were living paycheck to paycheck, so they really couldn't afford to pay such a huge fine.

「If any of you don't have enough money, my family still has some capital. We'll just call it a loan,」Wood Grace offered.

「Hey, since when has your family had a rich background?」

「This...」Wood Grace chuckled with embarrassment.「I've been investing my money and managed to earn a decent return.」

With this, he had solved quite a few of his brothers' dilemmas.

「Since this kid seems to have a pretty good eye for business, how about we have him invest the money we get in the future?」Smoke Stub asked the group. He knew from experience that what they lacked the most right now was money.

When Smoke Stub got to the transfer point, Cold Peak and Wood Grace were already there and others were slowly trickling in. There were already around a hundred people gathered, which was more than he expected on such short notice. Besides the old brothers who had come from Azure Falling Sky together, there were also some recent recruits who had entered Withered Leaf

later.

「Why isn't that scrub Samsara Lord here yet? Did he go offline or something?」Wood Grace asked.

「His damn granny is offline! Lemme go drag him here!」Cold Peak cursed. Samsara Lord was part of the group who came from Azure Falling Sky. If he didn't show up for this, those assembled here would see it as a betrayal.

「Samsara Lord might've logged off because he had something to do,」Smoke Stub interjected. The three people he had the most trust in were Cold Peak, Wood Grace, and Samsara Lord. Even if he was offline, there was no questioning his sense of brotherhood. Samsara Lord would definitely show up!

As even more people began showing up, it seemed as if their group would eventually amass over two hundred people.

After a while, Samsara Lord sprinted over haphazardly. Trying to catch his breath, he apologized,「Sorry, I had to go run an errand for my mom. There was nothing I could do. Thank god I'm not too late.」

「If you had dared to not come, I would have gone over to your house and pinched you to death!」Cold Peak threatened with a straight face. Samsara Lord had been with them from the onset, so it would've been a massive blow to their morale if he truly hadn't shown up.

「How could that be? You have way too little faith in me. With the boss gone, how could I stay? You insult me!」Samsara Lord glared at Cold Peak.

「Ok, ok! I was wrong!」Cold Peak apologized as he broke into laughter, unable to maintain his straight face.

Aqua Smoke Stub, grateful that Samsara Lord had indeed shown up, clapped his friend's back. His words had truly been prophetic.

「Oh right, Samsara Lord, I seem to recall that your early termination fee was thirty million yuan, almost as much as our boss',」Wood Grace suddenly asked. Samsara Lord was one of the top three Priests in the game, so his contract was worth a lot. Plus, as a Priest, his salary wasn't very high, so it might be difficult for him to come up with that much money.

Aqua Smoke Stub also thought about this problem before turning towards Samsara Lord.

Samsara Lord chuckled awkwardly as he scratched his neck. 「Although it's somewhat bothersome, it's not enough to bankrupt me. Don't worry about it.」

Aqua Smoke Stub and the others suddenly realized something. When Samsara Lord had gone offline, it was to gather money!

「Good brother, always feel free to tell us if you have any difficulties.」Smoke Stub knew full well that even if Samsara Lord

said nothing about it, collecting so much at once would definitely prove to be a burden.

「For sure, Samsara Lord. If anything's wrong then say so. There are enough of us here to overcome anything,」Wood Grace reassured as he patted his friend's shoulder.

「Don't worry about it,」Samsara Lord repeated.「It's already done, but I might have some trouble in the future. I put up my house for mortgage, and borrowed some from my friends and family. For the time being, could I go and room with you boss?」Samsara Lord asked with an embarrassed chuckle.

「Why did you go and make yourself so miserable? You could've just borrowed from me, you know,」Wood Grace said.

「Who knew you were such a tycoon? I thought everyone would be near-broke after paying their fees,」Samsara Lord sadly sighed.

Aqua Smoke Stub looked at the brothers standing before him. They were all eagerly looking back at him. They had all been willing to bankrupt themselves and give up on comfortable conditions in order to follow him. He had to make sure he remained worthy of them. Even if Withered Leaf let them down, he could never do so! Starting from today, the weary dragon would soar to the heavens! As the head of this dragon, he would lead them to the highest heavens!

## Chapter 236 – Dark Immortal

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The ruined altars and other desolate structures of the Moonlit Woodland gave off a mysterious, ancient feeling.

The white elves who belonged to the Satreen Empire were allies of mankind. However, conflict broke out between the Viridian Empire and Satreen Empire over territorial rights. A peace treaty was signed, and the branch of white elves residing in the Moonlit Woodland were forced to vacate their homeland for the distant Satreen.

Since white elves hadn't appeared in this land for over hundreds of years, they were but a distant legend to the people of the Viridian Empire.

Around the time Nie Yan advanced to a Great Thief—not long after the release of the Buried History expansion—white elves and beastmen began popping up in Calore, though not very many. After all, the cost of teleporting between the Viridian Empire and Satreen Empire was exorbitant. Only the executives of large guilds were capable of making a round trip. On the day before Nie Yan assassinated Cao Xu, the Viridian Empire started to sell griffons to the players, who could ride these mounts to travel between the two empires. However, it was something that Nie Yan never got a chance to experience.

This was the development path of Conviction. The area between major cities was extremely vast, so players started out the game being restricted to only the maps around their starting city. After the release of land mounts, players could travel much more easily



between cities. However, it was only after the release of flying mounts that players could truly travel the world.

Every empire had different governing rules, classes, religions, social customs, and cultures. The system gradually revealed this beautiful world to the players, piece by piece, captivating them as they exclaimed in admiration.

Although Nie Yan was still restricted to the territory around Calore, but from the ruins left behind in various maps by the white elves, dark elves, and beastmen in the past, he could peek a bit into their long history.

Nie Yan suspected that if he completed the first volume of the Book of Order, the release of the Buried History expansion would probably have to be shifted to an earlier date. He didn't know whether this was good or bad, but he could be sure of one thing. He would benefit greatly far into the future after obtaining this Legendary-grade item.

After passing through a dense patch of thickets, Nie Yan approached a clearing where he spotted six Moon Bears roaming around aimlessly. They were much larger than the average Moon Bear. There were also ruined walls surrounding the area. Carved on their surface were ancient designs and Elven characters. This place was where the white elves made offerings to the goddess of the moon.

These Moon Bears look like Elite monsters. Nie Yan stealthily crept behind a wall, then activated Transcendent Insight.

Rocky Moon Bear (Elite): Level 35

Health:11,000/11,000

These Rocky Moon Bears were unmatched existences to melee-class players. Without the support of a priest, no one under Level 40 would dare to attack them.

However, Nie Yan's path forward was blocked by these Rocky Moon Bears.

Nie Yan observed the movement paths of these Rocky Moon Bears for a while before taking out a Haste Scroll. Crushing the scroll in his hand he activated Shadow Waltz, then blurred into motion as he rapidly approached them.

One of the Rocky Moon Bears discovered Nie Yan through stealth. It let out a deep roar and swatted at him with an enormous paw.

Nie Yan accelerated. With a twist of his body, he brushed past the Rocky Moon Bear while dodging the oncoming paw by a hair's breadth.

With its sweeping attack hitting nothing but air, the Rocky Moon Bear staggered several steps before regaining balance. When it

turned around to search for its target, Nie Yan was already several meters away.

It was almost effortless for him to avoid the attack of the Rocky Moon Bear by relying on the techniques of a Shadow Dancer.

After Nie Yan outfoxed the first Rocky Moon Bear, the other five charged at him. It looked like he wasn't going to be left with a complete corpse in the next second. One of the Rocky Moon Bears stood tall on its hind legs, then heavily struck down with a Seismic Slam.

「BOOM!」Nie Yan sped back several paces. A large depression formed on the ground where he previously stood.

Nie Yan nimbly avoided the attacks of the Rocky Moon Bears, performing all sorts of acrobatic feats as he slipped through the gaps between them.

Nie Yan let loose as his speed reached the pinnacle.

Just as these Rocky Moon Bears attempted to charge over, Nie Yan threw out a pouch of Flash Powder.「Poof!」It exploded into a blinding flash of light.

The Rocky Moon Bears were all blinded. Letting out furious roars, they chaotically rammed into their surroundings. Nie Yan took advantage of the opportunity to escape, hopping over a nearby wall before disappearing into the trees. When they finally

regained their vision, he was nowhere to be found.

Because this region was still unexplored, there was an alarming number of Rocky Moon Bears roaming around. Nonetheless, Nie Yan was slowly able to make his way to the depths of the Moonlit Woodland by relying on his superior evasive techniques.

Getting Bladelight to explore this region when he reaches Level 35 doesn't sound like a bad idea. With his tankiness and Young Seven's support, leading a team here shouldn't be a problem, Nie Yan thought.

Nie Yan was pleasantly surprised when he encountered two gold chests and several silver chests while searching for the Chapter of Virtue. One of the gold chests even contained a Junior Magic Conduit Potion Recipe.

The Magic Conduit Potion was one of the highest quality potions. It was divided into four ranks: Junior, Intermediate, Advanced, and Specialist. Although the alchemy ingredients required to concoct it were fairly common, its recipe was extremely rare. In the previous timeline, the Intermediate version of this recipe was auctioned off for even more than the price of Sub-Legendary equipment. He had never seen the Advanced or Specialist versions before. It was almost impossible to estimate the value of a Junior Magic Conduit Potion Recipe at this stage of the game, when the player base was nowhere near Level 50.

Magic Conduit Potion: Advanced Magic Damage +20%,  
Advanced Magic Cast Time -10%, Talisman Inscribing Speed

The effects of the Magic Conduit Potion were truly rarely seen.

Since the recipe was so hard to find, the price of a single potion was as high as several dozen gold. Most Mages could only afford to use such an expensive potion after they advanced to Great Mages.

The manufacturing cost of a Magic Conduit Potion was relatively cheap, around 50 silver per bottle. It required over 30 different types of alchemy ingredients which fortunately were fairly common. The only slight drawback was that it took an Intermediate Alchemist 10 minutes to concoct a Junior Magic Conduit Potion with a 30% success rate, so the average production time of a single potion was around 35–40 minutes.

Every minute of an Intermediate Alchemist's time was precious.

However, the effects of a Magic Conduit Potion were exceedingly valuable to a Great Mage or even a Magister casting advanced magic. The advanced magic at the later stages of the game, although unrivalled in power, would require Magic Talismans that took over almost two hours, sometimes even up to four hours, to inscribe. A Magic Conduit Potion could help them save a lot of time. It was effectively trading an Intermediate Alchemist's time for the time of a Great Mage or Magister, a clearly exceedingly worthwhile trade. At the same time, drinking a Magic Conduit Potion significantly reduced the cast time of advanced magic, which was exceptionally useful on the battlefield where every second was crucial.

“I’ve struck it rich!” Nie Yan excitedly exclaimed. Only now did he realize why large guilds always wanted to be the first to explore a map no matter the cost.

Nie Yan couldn’t help but think that he lost out big time for not participating in any pioneering expeditions in the previous timeline. When he returned to the guild headquarters, he would have Guo Huai organize pioneering expeditions to various large, high-level maps.

「Nie Yan, where are you right now?」Just at this moment, Guo Huai gave him a ring.

「I’m in the Sonia Moonlit Woodland. Why, what’s up?」Nie Yan asked. For him to be contacted at this time, Guo Huai definitely wanted to inform him about something important.

「Azure Falling Sky has been absorbed by Radiant Sacred Flame.」

「Oh.」Nie Yan nodded.

「Aren’t you worried?」Guo Huai didn’t think Nie Yan’s reaction would be so calm. After all, Azure Falling Sky was a guild with over 20,000 players!

「What’s there to be worried about? I already figured this would happen. If it wasn’t Victorious Return, it would be Radiant Sacred Flame,」Nie Yan replied. Although he had never once regretted the

decision of helping out Withered Leaf, he imagined the hatred Clear Sky bore for him definitely wasn't shallow. It was inevitable that Azure Falling Sky would side with the enemy.

「Since it seems you have some countermeasures in mind, I won't say anymore. There's also one other thing I need to inform you about. Victorious Return recently hired someone from the Dark Immortal gaming organization. I heard they're going after you, so be careful,」Guo Huai said. Dark Immortal was the number one gaming organization in the nation.

「Shadow Killer?」Nie Yan muttered in a surprised tone. It seemed history had deviated from the previous timeline. He never expected Heaven Breaker would hire the services of the Dark Immortal gaming organization to deal with him. Just what sort of price was offered to tempt that person into agreeing to help Victorious Return?

In the previous timeline, there were two legendary characters in the world of Shadow Dancers. One was Sun, a young boy who matured at a startling pace to become an unrivalled genius that was absolutely dazzling as his namesake. And the other was Shadow Killer, a mysterious figure who rarely appeared out in the public. He didn't even take part in the Shadow Dancer competition. Everything about him was a riddle. However, before Sun was ever known, he was already famous. As the boss of the largest gaming organization in the country, Dark Immortal, his name had long since rang like thunder in the ears of players. However, the vast majority of people only knew the name, not the person.

Shadow Killer generally only took on assassination requests, and his services were always excessively expensive, to the extent that almost no one could afford them. A person like him only killed the most difficult targets, as though he was only doing it for the thrill. He never once slipped up. In the previous timeline, the list of people he successfully assassinated included figures like the guild leader of Victorious Return, Heaven Breaker; the guild leader of Radiant Sacred Flame, Nightbreak Trickster; and the guild leader of Battle Crazy Alliance, Kill Love. He was a person who didn't care about sides, only moving for money. He would only take on a request if you gave him a tempting enough offer. Back when Victorious Return was at the peak of its might in the Viridian Empire, Heaven Breaker, who was presumed to be untouchable at the time, still ended up dying at his hands.

「Yes, him,」Guo Huai said in a somewhat heavy tone. In every popular virtual reality game that came before Conviction, Shadow Killer was always an existence that countless people could never hope to reach for.

「Have you dug up any recent news about him?」

「No, only that the Dark Immortal gaming organization joined Victorious Return, and Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster have met up with him.」

「Are you sure his target is me?」

「I'm 90% certain, so that's why I'm warning you to be careful.」



「To be a target of Shadow Killer's assassination request, I truly feel honoured.」Nie Yan revealed a calm smile. He wasn't the slightest bit worried.

## Chapter 237 – True Illusion

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Nie Yan recalled the list of people Shadow Killer assassinated in the previous timeline. Who among them wasn't an extraordinary figure? He didn't expect that Shadow Killer's first assassination target in Conviction was very likely himself! This was a testament to the fact that he as well as Asskickers United were starting to shine on this stage, and were now the subject of much attention. Although he faced a certain degree of danger with this target on his back, the threat remained solely on him. Even if he was assassinated, Asskickers United would still remain standing strong!

「You're still in the mood to laugh?」Guo Huai asked in a dejected tone.

「You should be happy. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame hiring the services of Shadow Killer just to deal with me is a reflection of the fear in their hearts. They're afraid Asskickers United will shake their positions. What should we be anxious about? The ones who should be worried are them!」Nie Yan replied.

「Alright. I admit your words do make sense,」Guo Huai said helplessly. How did Nie Yan always somehow spin every troubling new development into a good piece of news?

Nie Yan chuckled.

「Let's not linger on the bad for too long. I have some good news to report as well. Firstly, the players on the forums recently created a ranking of the top guilds based on battle strength, and

Asskickers United placed in front of Radiant Sacred Flame, Victorious Return, and Holy Empire. They're calling Asskickers United a mecca of experts. Thanks to this exposure, a lot of strong players are starting to flock to our side. Secondly, both our branch guilds—Mages United and Warriors United—due to the joining requirements being relatively more lax, have reached the maximum capacity for Level 1 guilds, 20,000 players. I've also taken the liberty of establishing three more branch guilds, Paladins United, Thieves United, and Priests United. I plan to have the elite members of these branches rank up their guilds to Level 2.」Guo Huai was shocked by the expansion speed of the branch guilds which far exceeded his expectations.

「Mhmmm... things are developing at a good pace. We should transfer the strongest members of the branch guilds to the main guild,」Nie Yan said. The creation of branch guilds was an inevitability. Even though weak players couldn't join Asskickers United, it was a waste to squander free manpower.

「Lastly, we've been approached by several guilds about merging into Asskickers United,」Guo Huai said.

「Make sure to take the necessary precautions before letting any of them join,」Nie Yan reminded. It was very possible they harboured malicious motives.

「This, I understand. I'll do a thorough investigation. I won't be letting them in the guild any time soon anyway.」Guo Huai nodded. He was extremely prudent in handling this matter.

Even though Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were

rapidly expanding, Asskickers United wasn't sitting still either; it was thriving—developing at breakneck speed. After winning several major battles, their reputation benefited tremendously and the morale of their players skyrocketed. And their closest ally, Holy Empire, also got to share in some of the glory. Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return suffered a huge blow to their prestige after their recent defeat. With this shift in the balance of power, Asskickers United no longer had to fear them.

Nie Yan could now take a *laissez faire* approach to managing the guild. Asskickers United's rise to the top was a foregone conclusion. So long as enough time was given, they would crush Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return beneath their feet.

The players of Asskickers United were starting to enjoy the glory brought along by the rise of the guild. This sort of feeling would unite them even further. An undivided force was an impregnable stronghold that could never be destroyed!

「Is that everything?」Nie Yan asked.

「Yeah, that's everything,」Guo Huai replied. He understood Nie Yan was probably doing something important right now, so he didn't want to disturb him too much.

Nie Yan hung up the call before continuing to explore the heart of the Sonia Moonlit Woodland. He still hadn't found anything even after an hour of search.

He had only heard the Chapter of Virtue was found in the

Moonlit Woodland. He didn't actually know its exact location, so he could only go bumbling around the area like a housefly.

In the previous timeline, countless players came here to retrieve the Chapter of Virtue only to wind up dying. In the end, a Mage who possessed very powerful control magic cleared all the monsters in the Moonlit Woodland, and took away the Chapter of Virtue. As for the name of this player, Nie Yan had already forgotten since they lost the chapter shortly after obtaining it.

Nie Yan evaded numerous Moon Bears before reaching a heavily forested region. The dense canopy blocked out most of the sky, leaving only a few rays of sunlight to penetrate the foliage and touch the ground.

These rays were gentle like the moonlight, releasing a faint purifying glow.

Nie Yan's eyes locked onto a certain object up ahead.

At the center of the clearing up ahead, a pure white beam of light shined down on a delicately carved round stone platform covered in exotic elven runes. Floating above the platform was a crescent moon-shaped stone which emitted a faint white glow.

「You've discovered a bizarre stone while exploring in the heart of the Moonlit Woodland. According to the old Mage living in the slums of Calore, the stone is called the Stone of Moonlight. Capable of transforming the stars and changing night to day, it was this stone that allowed the white elves to have such long lifespans. A

relic like this can supply a Mage with boundless magical power.」

Nie Yan's mind trembled when he read through the narration dialogue. Is this a quest related to the Chapter of Virtue? I've searched around this area for so long without any success. Maybe this Stone of Moonlight is the key to finding what I'm looking for?

Nie Yan approached the Stone of Moonlight which seemed to emit a mysterious attractive force. Slowly, he reached out his hand and touched the stone. A gentle energy permeated his entire body.

With his hand still pressed on the stone, Nie Yan saw his surroundings undergo endless transformations. The trees quickly withered before disappearing altogether. The sun and moon raced across the sky at an astonishing speed, chasing after each other faster and faster. As light and shadow intertwined, it was like he was travelling through time.

It was as though several thousand years was passing by in front of his eyes; all that remained was an endless wilderness that stretched out into the horizon. A full moon hovered in the dark sky above, illuminating the land in its light.

Nie Yan lowered his head, only to discover that the stone platform in front of him had disappeared. Oddly shaped boulders towered above the dark wilderness. His vision was limited, but he could spot the flickering of flames in the far distance.

You've entered the Hidden Realm of Moonlight.

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Just what kind of place was this Hidden Realm of Moonlight? Nie Yan guessed that he was probably transported into a quest map. After carrying out a self-inspection, he confirmed that he couldn't activate any teleportation items, including the Random Transfer Scroll.

This meant a life-saving trump card of his was sealed!

The far away flames appeared to be a guide marker. Nie Yan entered the pitch-black wilderness, advancing in that direction.

The surroundings were deathly silent. Not even the sound of insects could be heard.

Afraid there might be unknown danger lurking in the darkness around him, Nie Yan slowed his pace; every step he took was exceedingly cautious.

Just at this moment, a peculiar sensation arose in the back of his mind, as though he was being watched by something. He searched for the source of this feeling.

Nie Yan closed his eyes, sharpening his other senses to the utmost limit as he felt for movement. A brief moment later, he abruptly turned to face a certain direction. Eye of Truth! His eyes turned bloodshot, while the veins around his eyes bulged out, emitting a light which pierced through the veil of darkness. All he saw was a shadowy silhouette blur by.

He discovered the enemy!

Upon being spotted, the shadow melted into the darkness and vanished without a trace. No matter how hard he tried, he could no longer detect its presence.

However, the split-second before the shadow disappeared, Nie Yan had activated Transcendent Insight.

He examined the information from the inspection.

True Illusion (Nirvana Flame): Level 35

Health: 963/963

Nie Yan’s heart shook. Just what was that? His own shadow?

He finally had a vague understanding of the gimmick of this hidden realm. It was using a copy of his character to test him! The goal was to prevail over his AI-controlled fake, with the main catch being that the stats of his fake were higher than his own!

“Fighting myself? Bring it on!” Nie Yan tightly grasped his dagger before going into stealth.



His eyes pierced through the darkness, searching for traces of the opponent, while he slowly made his advance

Nie Yan suddenly sensed danger from behind him. His heart tightened. Shit! It can see through my stealth!

The stats of the True Illusion eclipsed his own. His position was completely exposed, allowing the enemy to mount an exceptionally fierce sneak attack.

The True Illusion aimed his dagger at the back of Nie Yan's head with a Smothering Strike. Its blade flickered with a sharp light, edging ever closer.

Sensing the danger in advance, Nie Yan whipped back and struck at the True Illusion's forehead, but he didn't activate any stunning skills.

The True Illusion retreated several steps before melting into the darkness again, vanishing right in front of Nie Yan's eyes.

It was just as he imagined. The True Illusion was feeling him out, searching for a weakness while trying to bait him into wasting his skills!

The combat AI of the True Illusion was in no way inferior to a human!

After fending off the ambush, Nie Yan was just about to enter

stealth when the True Illusion suddenly materialized beside him and launched another sneak attack. Its dagger stabbed toward his back like a lightning bolt.

This speed clearly exceeded his own by quite some!

Parry!

Just as the True Illusion's attack was about to reach him, Nie Yan turned around, parrying it with his off-hand dagger which was held in a reverse grip.「Ding!」The two daggers briefly clashed, causing sparks to fly. At the same instant, his other dagger struck out toward the True Illusion's forehead like a viper.

The True Illusion disappeared.

Nie Yan slightly trembled when his attack struck air. The True Illusion had clearly used Shadow Waltz to dodge!

He tried to look for the True Illusion, but it had already gotten away.

Nie Yan had heard about quests with similar gimmicks in his past life. When players encountered these sorts of quests, they would recount them on the forums. Although he never paid careful attention to these posts, he had seen enough to know that less than 1% of the players who received these quests were able to beat them. However, those who cleared them would always receive astonishing rewards! Some received a great deal of additional stat

points. Others received powerful skills. And still others received Sub-Legendary equipment.

Nie Yan wondered what kind of reward he would receive for clearing it. Let's see just how wily my AI controlled copy is. He revealed a hint of an expectant smile.

At the end of the day, the True Illusion was still controlled by an AI. Although a computer could handle an enormous flow of data, it was still incapable of matching the deviousness of the human mind.

## Chapter 238 – White Elves

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Nie Yan's mind raced as he considered various scenarios in search of a way to ambush the True Illusion. He needed to trick it into walking into the trap of its own accord.

Standard traps reliant on common skills had no chance of catching the True Illusion off guard. He could only look for a more unorthodox strategy.

The system used precise calculations to allow the True Illusion to maximize efficiency and act with precision accurate to several decimal points. By doing so, it could maximize the True Illusion's combat abilities in a way no human could. However, the system still had to maintain some semblance of fairness, so the True Illusion didn't know Nie Yan's stats. Otherwise, if it possessed Nie Yan's skill and stat data on top of maximum combat efficiency, it wouldn't even be possible to damage it, much less beat it.

After careful consideration, Nie Yan concluded that his best chance would be to change his attack speed and patterns to trick the True Illusion's relatively rigid algorithms.

Nie Yan calculated the combat power brought to him by his stats, especially his movement and attack speed. His calculation speed was obviously nowhere near the system's, and he was only able to come up with a rough estimate. Hmmm... I'll only use 95% of my attack speed to scout him out.

Before Nie Yan knew it, ten minutes of quick exchanges had

passed. Both of them made sure to disengage after every single move, conserving their strength as they gauged their opponent. For a Thief in head-on combat, trading blows in this tentative manner served an incredibly important purpose. It allowed him to learn more about his opponent before launching a fatal blow. The ancient practice of gathering information on an enemy before launching the real attack worked for Thieves as well.

Additionally, Nie Yan began purposely leaving a peculiar false opening for his opponent. Even when it would be easier to use a forehand move to block, he manoeuvred his hand to perform a backhand block.

Nie Yan's act was world-class. His lowered attack speed and defensive quirk flowed seamlessly as though they were naturally ingrained instincts.

Almost everyone had some odd quirks in combat. A skilled player knew to look for such tells in order to abuse them, and the AI was no different. Under Nie Yan's meticulous trickery, the True Illusion finally decided to act on what it saw as Nie Yan's biggest weakness: he only blocked with backhands.

After yet another strike and parry, the True Illusion entered stealth. It didn't reengage, choosing to stay hidden among the shadows. Nie Yan didn't think anything of it until two minutes had already passed. Feeling that something was off, he took a deep breath and readied himself. The storm is coming! It's probably just waiting for its cooldowns to run out now.

He couldn't afford to mess up here at the final stretch! Nie Yan

double-checked his skill bar to make sure his skills were all up before looking up again.

Right at that moment, the True Illusion appeared behind him, aiming its dagger at the back of his head. Before Nie Yan could turn around, the True Illusion launched its attack, lunging forward and plunging its dagger at its target.

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz to dodge the attack, reappearing behind the True Illusion. He performed the exact same move he had just dodged, stabbing at the back of the opponent's head with lightning speed.

The True Illusion immediately turned around and blocked Nie Yan's strike with its own dagger. This was the first time the two crossed blades repeatedly instead of retreating after the first sparks flew up in the air. Since neither of them were proficient in control skills, they could only spam their attack skills again and again.

Finally, Nie Yan managed to land a Vital Strike followed by Eviscerate. The True Illusion took over 100 damage, but quickly struck back with a Backstab for over 300 health.

The True Illusion's attack and defense were both higher than Nie Yan's. After trading just a few hits, Nie Yan was already down to 15% health. He hastily backed up before chugging an Intermediate Health Potion, recovering his health.

No matter how they clashed, Nie Yan maintained his facade of only blocking with backhands. He also made sure to keep key skills

such as Intimidate and Concussive Blow in reserve

The True Illusion's health was slowly chipped away at in their clashes, but Nie Yan wasn't the only one with health potions. His copy also drank an Intermediate Health Potion, instantly refilling its health bar.

Damn it, I had him down to 30%! This thing can use health potions too! Nie Yan felt more than a little frustrated seeing the True Illusion shrug off all the damage he'd done to it. He suspected that it had some mechanism to prevent wearing it down in a battle of attrition, but he hadn't expected it to be as direct as a health potion. As he'd thought, the only way to beat it was to control the flow of battle and make it fall for a trick.

Nie Yan continued to wait for an opportunity to strike. Neither of them had used Intimidate or Concussive Blow yet, nor any other major skill. They had both been using low-cooldown skills just to wear the opponent's health down.

Of course, in such a battle of attrition, Nie Yan's health wore down much faster than the True Illusion's.

After a while, Nie Yan began applying Combat Bandages to himself to keep his health up. As the True Illusion watched Nie Yan use yet another method to heal himself, it finally ran out of patience. It activated Shadow Waltz, closing the gap in an instant, and used Intimidate.

Nie Yan's body stiffened. He was momentarily immobile!

Before being struck by Intimidate, Nie Yan made sure to keep his dagger in a forehand grip.

Noticing the forehand position of Nie Yan's dagger, the True Illusion's AI decided that this was a prime opportunity to attack. It immediately sped its dagger toward Nie Yan's forehead.

The dagger quickly closed the distance, striking as fast as a gale with the momentum of lightning.

If Nie Yan tried to do as he had done before and switch to a backhand before parrying, he would definitely be too late.

Instead, he squinted deviously and swung out for a forehand, blocking the True Illusion's attack.

The True Illusion's eyes narrowed. A puzzled expression appeared on its face as it went over its data again. However, despite multiple recalculations, it couldn't figure out where the original calculation had went awry.

Right then, the effects of Intimidate wore off.

“My turn.” Nie Yan grinned sinisterly as he activated Intimidate, causing the True Illusion's body to stiffen.

Nie Yan used Shadow Waltz to circle behind the True Illusion.



Before it could turn around, Nie Yan pierced its heart with Backstab. He instantly followed up with an Eviscerate that left the illusion spurting geysers of blood.

Vital Strike!

Nie Yan used another Vital Strike before stepping back to watch the damage rack up. Various damage values floated up above the True Illusion's head: his attack damage, his poison damage, and his two bleed damages.

When the effects of Intimidate finally wore off, the True Illusion tried to move away. But before it could do anything, Nie Yan struck from behind with a Smothering Strike and stunned it. Smothering Strike's stun effect would wear off if the target was attacked, so Nie Yan took the time to nimbly circle back in front of the True Illusion. He continued his attack with Concussive Blow, followed by Assassinate and Lacerate. Nie Yan stepped to the side of the True Illusion, his dagger flashing across his opponent's throat. Slicing out one last time, he slit his opponent's throat with a well-placed Cut Throat.

It was a perfect [stun lock](#)!

A stun lock (also called stunlocking) is the act of using multiple stuns and immobilizing effects in succession to prevent an enemy from fighting back or escaping. As a result, a stunlock sacrifices a large amount of DPS in exchange for keeping the opponent "locked down", but that doesn't matter because it is extremely annoying and in the act of stunlocking, provides other players to freely attack the enemy as he stands there unable to do anything. Although typically and most easily accomplished by a rogue, it can

also be achieved to lesser degrees by other characters.

He hadn't even given the True Illusion a chance to react!

Although his control skills only affected the opponent for a second each, they became highly lethal when chained together. Although he didn't have many such skills, Nie Yan's timing and efficiency in chaining them already reached the peak of stunning for Thieves.

The True Illusion swayed oddly for a second until its health finally drained to zero. Its corpse collapsed miserably before fading into a shadow and dissipating into nothingness.

Nie Yan grinned with giddy relief. He finally beat his copy, but it had been even harder than he'd expected. He looked down where the corpse had disappeared and saw a black cloak laying on the ground.

This should be a great piece of Thief equipment!

Nie Yan bent down to pick up the cloak.

### Nirvana Flame's Cloak of Void (Special)

Description: A True Illusion's cloak woven from the owner's shadow. A player's trophy for beating their True Illusion.

Properties: 120-139 Defense, +30 Strength, +30 Dexterity, +10 Speed, +10 Stealth, +10 Cloaking, +10 Reflex

Void Concealment: Stay completely hidden among the shadows. Stealth Effect +300%. Movement Speed -50%. Cannot be seen through stealth for the first nine seconds upon activation. Unable to attack for the first 20 seconds while this skill is active. Duration: 60 seconds.

Cooldown: 2 days

Restriction: Only the named player may equip this item.

It was a piece of special equipment marked with his name! Only Nie Yan could equip this item. Its properties were pretty good, but it was the supplementary skill that really made his heart throb. Void Concealment was simply too useful. When he came across a life-threatening adversary, he could use it as a life-saving skill. Even more importantly, he could use this skill to gain access to at least five Sub Legendary and over a dozen Legendary fragments!

It was precisely this that made the skill so valuable!

The item bound itself automatically, so it could neither be traded to others nor dropped upon his death. If there came a day when he no longer wanted it, he could discard it and it would disappear forever.

The Void Concealment skill had a cooldown of two days, but for some reason it was ready the moment Nie Yan got it.

After thinking it over, Nie Yan figured that it probably meant he needed it to complete this quest map. Do I have to make use of this Cloak of Void to complete the Hidden Realm of Moonlight quest?

The contents of some special quests would change according to the class of the participant. Nie Yan was a Thief, so for an item like this to drop now, it made sense that it would be needed to complete the quest.

Nie Yan decided to wait and see. He crept through the darkness toward the distant flames. After the True Illusion, he encountered no other enemies. As he got closer, he could see a white tent contrasted against the night. Outside the tent, several NPCs were sitting around a leaping bonfire.

Nie Yan didn't dare to be rash. He slowly crept forward to get a better view. Hidden within the underbrush, he could finally see the faces of the NPCs. There were five white elves, three males and two females. All of them were Mages. They had beautiful appearances and fair skin, but their ears weren't pointed like those of true elves. They appeared to be half-elves.

Nie Yan thought for a moment before slowly approaching the white elves with Disappear, whereupon he activated Transcendent Insight.

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Traitor Kasa (Elite): Level 35

Health: 5,000/5,000

It was a Level 35 Elite! The others were probably of similar strength. Seeing that these half-elves were all humanoid creatures with individual names, Nie Yan expected them to be difficult to deal with. Nie Yan looked through the open flap of the tent, only to see a girl lying in a bed. He couldn't make out her features, but there was a thin sheet of paper floating in a circle around her. Magical elements of all colours glowed around her. Nie Yan was extremely familiar with these things! He had finally found what he was looking for, the Chapter of Virtue!

He had worn through iron shoes with no success, only to acquire it through no effort of his own!

Nie Yan was just about to show himself when the half-elves' ears twitched as if they had heard something.

Nie Yan quickly held his breath as the four elves looked around cautiously. However, not seeing anything, they resumed their chatter.

Nie Yan slowly backed up. There was no need for him to get into a fight with these half-elves. All he wanted was the Chapter of Virtue.

However, based on his previous experiences with the other chapters from the Book of Order, he knew there couldn't be just these five Elites guarding the chapter!

## Chapter 239 – Chapter Of Virtue

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Nie Yan seemed to melt entirely into the darkness as he spied at the white elves' every move. As he did so, he also noticed a complete absence of any creature, save for them and himself.

He waited patiently in the shadows as he searched the forums for terms like “Hidden Realm of Moonlight” and “traitors.” Every now and then, he'd stumble on some background information about the quest—but, of course, it was only background information. The task of finding the specific details of the quest still fell onto the players' shoulders.

The Hidden Realm of Moonlight was a region created by the ancient white elves to seal away demons. With the power of the Stone of Moonlight, the white elves distorted spacetime and created an entirely new dimension space.

There were white elves that had traces of dark elf and human bloodlines due to intermarriage during the Era of Shared Governance. Their greed and violence betrayed the beliefs of the elves' Moonlight Goddess, and some had even become demons—ruthless killing machines that murdered even their own.

The white elves were forced to expend large amounts of energy to deal with these deviated elves and seal them within the Stone of Moonlight.

Let me see if there's anything on Sonia Moonlight Woodlands.

Sonia Moonlight Woodlands: Long ago, Sonia was the queen of the white elves within the territory of Calore. Her kindness and gentleness deceived the white elves at this division and led them astray, slowly turning them into bandits. At first, the progress was very slow, but when the demon buried deep within herself awakened, everything took a turn for the worse. She became vicious, bloodthirsty, and even slaughtered the elders residing in a village. The remaining white elves had no choice but to seal Sonia into the Stone of Moonlight.

Amid the changes that inevitably came with time, several hundred years passed by in the blink of an eye.

Demonification was a transformation of sorts. The ancient legends spoke of a demon hidden within the hearts of every living being on the Atlanta continent. If one's faith were swayed to the point they lost their footing, that demon would engulf their soul and turn them into powerful demons.

Elites and Lords after Demonification were much more powerful than their predecessors. They all held immense power far more terrifying than Super Variants.

Don't tell me... there's a Demonified Elite or Lord in this map? Maybe even Queen Sonia herself?

Nie Yan's gaze found its way back into the tent, once again onto the Chapter of Virtue.

Perhaps there was a special way to trigger a quest—starting a



conversation with the white elves up ahead for instance—but he did not want to risk it. His eyes were fixed on the colourful page hovering silently in the air, and a fiery desire burned ablaze in Nie Yan's mind...

I have to take it!

With the Cloak of Void, it would be a breeze to snatch the Chapter of Virtue past those white elf mages.

The first volume would essentially be complete the moment he got his hands on it, and the fabled item would be his forever!

But then, Nie Yan slid his gaze to the young lady sleeping nearby; she was probably Elf Queen Sonia—a Demonified Lord!

Nie Yan immediately weighed the potential benefits and losses of the attempt.

Snatching the Chapter of Virtue would awaken Elf Queen Sonia, and any form of teleportation was barred within the Hidden Realm of Moonlight. The sole thing awaiting him would be death.

Nie Yan glimpsed at the red name practically glaring at him, courtesy of 327 player kills. Such an intense colour implied he'd lose a minimum of ten levels if he died.

He wore a smile tinged with a hint of regret as he thought, I should have gotten rid of this red name before coming here!

His eyes remained locked on the Chapter of Virtue so close ahead while his mind briefly struggled with the decision. Should I go for it? Soon, however, he made his choice. Quests? Who cares! I'll care after taking the Chapter of Virtue. Levels? Who cares! I'll grind them back up later!

Nie Yan crept toward the tent, beyond the five white elf mages. As he neared them, one of them pricked his ear and quivered slightly, as if he felt something.

Without hesitation, Nie Yan activated the Cloak of Void. The effect of stealth soared threefold, and in turn his speed was cut in half.

The white elf mage didn't spot anything out of the ordinary and returned to his earlier conversation.

Enhanced with greater stealth, Nie Yan inched toward the white elf mages. Finally, he could make out their words.

"I don't know how much longer the Chapter of Virtue can maintain its holy power," Traitor Kasa said as he glanced toward the tent. "But more than anything, I hope Queen Sonia can continue to rest as peacefully as she is now." His apprehension still remained from the time the queen had been awakened.

"We have to find the Water of Purification. It's the only thing that can remove our Queen's seal, and help us break out of the Hidden Realm of Moonlight."

Traitor Zira sighed, shaking his head. “It’s simply impossible to find the Water of Purification with our power. It’s in the Dark Ravine, and unless we find a human Great Mage... but then again, they would kill her.”

“We can only hope for a miracle to happen,” said Traitor Kasa.

The conversation closely resembled a quest initiation of some sort, but nonetheless it brought Nie Yan quite a bit of information. If he were to follow the standard procedure of the questline, he would have to ask for the quest from the five white elf mages and complete it before he could safely leave with the Chapter of Virtue. One of the conditions of the quest was clearly to find the Water of Purification!

The quest sounded rather difficult even without the resurrection of a Demonified Lord. With it? The risk was far too great.

If any other player came here, they would have no choice but to follow the quest line. They would only be able to retrieve the Chapter of Virtue after completing the entire quest. Otherwise, even if they managed to grab it, they would get killed without even having a chance to escape. However, Nie Yan already had the other five chapters of Volume I of the Book of Order. Once he got his hands on the Chapter of Virtue, he could finally combine the six chapters into the complete Volume I. When that happened, it would automatically be bound to him. He could completely skip the quest line. What did a single death matter?

So long as he retrieved the Chapter of Virtue, it would all be worth it!

Nie Yan took a detour around the white elves while creeping towards the tent. As he snuck into the tent, his nose was immediately assaulted by a strong flowery fragrance, which was strong enough to shake his mind. He scanned around the tent before stopping in front of a female white elf reclined on a bed, whereupon he held his breath.

She was beautiful in a distinctly inhuman way. Her alluring cheekbones made her seem like the statue of a siren, lacking any trace of imperfection. Her pointy ears were the icing on the cake of her charm, mesmerizing all who saw her. Further down was an image that made one's blood boil. She wore only a chestpiece and a skirt, both woven from tree vines. Her clothes, which were of a type exclusively worn by White Elves, revealed vast expanses of snowy white skin. Her crystal-smooth skin emitted a luster unique to jade-skinned beauties.

Nie Yan inspected her with Transcendent Insight.

White Elf Sonia (Demonified Lord): Level 35

Health: 120,000/120,000

It was just as he predicted, a powerful Demonified Lord!

Nie Yan withdrew his gaze after a brief look. No matter how beautiful an NPC was, it was still just a game, to say nothing of the fact that Sonia was a Demonified Lord-class boss. A person with a mature mind would never lose their head over such a thing.

The Chapter of Virtue was almost within reach. Nie Yan could practically feel the intense magic radiating off of it.

Such divine power! Such powerful magic!

Nie Yan readied himself to flee the moment the Chapter of Virtue was his, before reaching for it. When his outstretched hand touched the sheet, it slowly retracted its brilliant radiance. The now ordinary-looking sheet fell into Nie Yan's hand.

Nie Yan quickly scanned the properties of the Chapter of Virtue.

### Chapter of Virtue

**Description:** The second chapter of Volume I of the Book of Order. A fragment of a Legendary item. Whoever shall possess this chapter will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!

**Properties:** Receive 2 Intelligence and 1 mastery point every 5 levels. Focus +15, Willpower +15, Resilience +16, Jump +15, Reflex +15, Movement Speed +16.

Decree of Reckoning: Invoke the magical power in your surroundings to attack the opponent, dealing (3x Magic Power + 2x Focus + Willpower) as magic damage.  
Cooldown: 10 days (1/10)

God's Judgment: Grants Magic Power +200%, +500 health, and a magic barrier that absorbs 60% of all incoming damage.  
Cooldown: 10 days (1/10)

Restrictions: Can only be bound by a member of the Righteous Guardian of Order.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's inventory.

The Chapter of Virtue was only second to the Chapter of Justice. Decree of Reckoning was a skill that was guaranteed to kill the opponent, and God's Judgement was even more powerful. The only flaw was that the cooldowns of these two skills were extremely long.

Sonia awoke the moment Nie Yan grabbed hold of the Chapter of Virtue. A baleful, demonic aura flooded out of her body, and her eyes were pitch-black as though a demon had taken possession of her body.

Nie Yan's chest tightened in alarm. She was awakening! Without delay, he stuffed the Chapter of Virtue away into his bag, then bolted out of the tent.

The further away he got from here, the better. He didn't know if he could even escape the Hidden Realm of Moonlight!

Just at this moment, the five white elves cried out in alarm.

“A despicable bastard! That Thief snatched away the Chapter of Virtue!”

“Kill him!”

The five white elves searched for Nie Yan's whereabouts. They were prepared to surround and kill him, but his Cloak of Void allowed him to completely avoid their detection as he fled from the campsite. Red clouds gathered in the sky up ahead, then scorching hot balls of fire rained down.

As soon as Nie Yan noticed something was off, he halted his footsteps before going around, safely avoiding this large area-of-effect spell.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Fireballs poured down from the sky, causing embers to fly everywhere.

Nie Yan fled into the endless wilderness at top speed before disappearing into the darkness. He understood that the danger was far from over because he didn't know where the exit was, nor could he use any teleportation items!

Just as this moment, the chapters from the Book of Order in his bag let out a faint radiance and began resonating with each other

Do you wish to merge the Chapter of Justice, Chapter of Virtue, Chapter of Courage, Chapter of Wisdom, Chapter of Harmony, and Chapter of Freedom into the Volume I of the Book of Order?

“Yes!”

Nie Yan pressed confirm without the slightest hesitation, causing a blinding radiance to blossom outward. It was as though the sun had emerged in this realm of endless night. He quickly averted his eyes.

The first volume of the Book of Order was now complete! Nie Yan couldn't help but get excited!



# Chapter 240 – Volume I: Glimpse Of Darkness

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A blinding radiance blossomed outwards in a flash. The six chapters merged into a whole, transforming into an unassuming black book. The cover was exquisitely manufactured, with a single line of Ancient Common characters written on top. The words, inscribed with tadpole-like strokes, gave off an aura of elegance and wisdom.

The book in his hands seemed rather thick, almost as though it was composed of more than the original six pages. A mysterious yet powerful force emanated from it. Nie Yan traced his fingers over the cover, and as he did, he felt the odd energy become stronger, giving him a feeling of calmness in his soul.

Looking closely at the words on the cover, Nie Yan read, “Book of Order, Volume I: Glimpse of Darkness.”

Do you wish to bind this item?

Yes! Nie Yan didn’t hesitate before immediately pressing confirm. He would bind it before thinking about anything else, so it wouldn’t drop if he died. So long as it was bound, he wouldn’t have to worry about losing it ever again.

Item has been successfully bound.

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Once the book was bound to him, Nie Yan felt an immediate increase to his stats, as if they'd increased by over 50! At the same time, a smaller line of characters wriggled into being in the air before imprinting themselves onto the lower right corner of the book's cover: "Owner: Nirvana Flame."

This legendary item was now truly and completely Nie Yan's. It was even marked with his name! No one else would ever possess Volume I of the Book of Order.

However, he was still being hunted by the half-elves, and the light from fusing Volume I had given away his position. He had no time to look closely at this new item of his; he first needed to find a way out of this realm.

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz, bursting forwards with incredible speed. However, this quest map was just too vast. No matter how far he ran, it seemed like there was no end in sight. Making matters worse, Nie Yan could sense that the five Mages following him were quickly closing in on him.

The five figures behind him were somehow even faster than he was. Slowly but steadily, they closed the distance toward Nie Yan.

Another figure soared high into the sky, and time seemed to stop. Nie Yan could see even from far away that it was the Demonified Lord Sonia. A pair of fleshy wings sprouted from her back, holding her aloft with an occasional mighty flap. She hung from the sky with the moon behind her back.

She scanned through the darkness and instantly locked onto the fleeing Nie Yan.

Nie Yan, feeling a piercing pain in his heart, slowed to a stop. He was caught by surprise when he saw the Demonified Lord Sonia flying through the sky. Facing a creature with the ability to fly at his current level was a disaster waiting to unfold. Only Mages could contend with such creatures at this stage of the game, and even they would be at a disadvantage. However, that was still many times better than engaging a flying monster in a melee. The outcome of such a fight held no suspense.

That girl has Demonic sight. Ugh... I guess I can't hide anymore. Nie Yan thought things over, then put all of his unbound equipment into his bag and sprinted off.

Sonia waved her staff and chanted in a demonic language until her spell was complete. A looming darkness enshrouded Nie Yan, sending out tentacles of darkness to bind him in place. No matter how much he struggled, he couldn't break free from the prison of shadowy tentacles.

Sonia steadily flapped her wings as she floated toward Nie Yan. Her slow flight speed betrayed her unfamiliarity with her wings.

"It was that Thief! He's over there, caught in the Queen's Shadow Bind!"

The five white elves quickly moved to surround Nie Yan. As they

faced him, balls of magic began to shine from their hands.

Nie Yan looked around him, in every direction, but there was no path of escape left. Realization of his impending doom dawned on him.

The glowing orbs arced through the night, leaving behind streaks of light as they blasted into Nie Yan, bursting apart with successive loud bangs. Each spell did over 300 damage to Nie Yan, who collapsed under the elves' barrage.

Sonia spread her wings as she landed, a puzzled expression on her face. She had no idea why Nie Yan's corpse didn't have the Chapter of Virtue on it.

A long time passed before Nie Yan opened his eyes. When he finally did, he found that his soul was in a cemetery.

Despite having struggled against it for so long, he still couldn't avoid the fate of death.

Do you wish to revive?

There were three ways for a player to revive. The first was to run back to the place you were killed and search for your corpse. Upon resurrection the player would lose 50% of their experience bar. They would also be in a weakened state for five minutes, during

which all stats would be lowered by 80%. If the player died with a red name, these penalties would scale with the redness of their name. Choosing this option in PvP made it too easy for an enemy to spawn camp you.

The second way was to wait for a Priest to revive you. This method came with the smallest penalty. The player would lose between 0-50% of their experience bar, and they would be in a weakened state for one minute. If the player had a red name, those penalties would be doubled.

The third and final method was to directly revive at the cemetery. This came with the biggest penalty. The player would drop a full level and be in a weakened state for half an hour. Like with the first method, dying with a red name would result in a penalty increase proportional to how red the name was. Although this option came with the heaviest penalties, it was clearly the safest of the three.

Nie Yan chose to directly revive. He looked sadly at his current level: Level 23. After working so hard for so long, he now had to climb back up from rock bottom. Fortunately, he could still head to Everlasting City and throw Basic Magic Bombs to grind back up.

Since he was in a weakened state right now, Nie Yan knew that it was not a good time to go level. Instead, he returned to Calore while itching to take a closer look at what Volume I of the Book of Order had in store for him. After all, he'd lost over 10 Levels and almost even lost all his equipment for this!

Nie Yan had to find a quiet, secure place to do this. He made his

way to the Starry Night Potion Shop, walked in, and found an empty workshop.

He took out Volume I: Glimpse of Darkness, placed it on the desk, and examined its properties.

### Volume I: Glimpse of Darkness (Legendary)

Rank (1): Can be upgraded by slaying evil creatures.

Description: The owner of this item will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!

Properties: Receive 5 stat points and 3 mastery points every 5 levels. Strength +100, Dexterity +200, All Stats +30, All Stats +50%. Gain 500 phantom stat points. Unlock the Glimpse of Darkness Skill Tree.

Restrictions: Permanently bound to Nirvana Flame.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's bag.

The item gave outstanding bonuses. He received a ton of extra stat points, and he even got the Glimpse of Darkness skill tree; although he did not yet know what this was. But the thing that really made him raise his eyebrows, were the 500 phantom stat

points he was given.

The book actually gives 500 phantom stats!

Phantom stats were different from his real stats. They wouldn't actually affect you, hence the name. Otherwise, it would be far too overpowered if he could just add 500 Strength on a whim. However, phantom stat points did count for equipment restrictions. Even if his real stats didn't meet the requirements to wear a piece of equipment, his phantom stats would be able to make that up for him, allowing him to wield a wide variety of equipment.

Nie Yan immediately thought of his [Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow](#). If he used a portion of his phantom stats on Strength, he would be able to meet the requirements for that item. The ability to use such a powerful crossbow at this point in the game was sure to bring him countless benefits.

Flipping to the second page, Nie Yan found a skill tree consisting of over 20 skills. All of them appeared to be extremely powerful. Several skill icons at the base of the tree were lit up. They included Disappear and Sacrificial Gambit from the Chapter of Freedom, and Adjudicator of God and Transcendent Insight from the Chapter of Courage. Surprisingly, such skills were placed at the very bottom, and they were all already unlocked!

Higher up on the skill tree were a bunch of greyed-out skill icons including skills such as Hurricane Ambush and Umbra Slaughter. The grey icons each had a requirement attached to it. Some of them required him to kill a hundred thousand undead monsters,

while others needed him to kill a thousand demon Elites at or above his level.

Each of the skills left Nie Yan dazed. They were all on par with skills such as [Adjudicator of God](#) and [Sacrificial Gambit](#). However, the requirements to unlock them were equally ridiculous.

If he wanted to have such powerful skills, he naturally had to pay an equally heavy price.

Nie Yan finally understood what the Book of Order meant when it said, “The owner of this item will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!” It seemed that he would have to kill dark creatures en masse. Perhaps after he got strong enough, he could find some time to go on an adventure through Underworld City.

There was no need to doubt the might of Volume I: Glimpse of Darkness, which gave him access to a myriad of powerful skills.

Flipping to the third page, Nie Yan saw the illustrations of an eight piece equipment set which consisted of a leather chest armour, cloak, gloves, pants, boots, shoulderguards, and two different daggers. The design was quite unusual—a deep shade of violet, with a different rune marking each set piece. Just the picture seemed to radiate an aura of ancientness. He was instantly enamoured by this set, especially the pair of daggers whose edges curved in an unusual way. They radiated a stifling murderous aura that would shake the minds of anyone who set their eyes on them.



# Ancient Order: Tyrant Abak Set

Abak was a human tyrant from the Era of Shared Governance. He had brutally slain Monarch Agnes to seize the throne, dispelling the parliament. Under his bloody rule, the kingdom fell into a period of darkness. After he was defeated by General Brook later on, his equipment set disappeared into the sands of time.

The Glimpse of Darkness has several clues about this set. Brave adventurer, set forth on your journey to reclaim the long-lost Tyrant Abak Set!

It was a Legendary set left behind by a legendary tyrant!

The Tyrant Abak Set!

This was what you called a godly equipment set!

Nie Yan looked at the clues below the illustrations.

The Tyrant Abak Set has been lost for many years. One of the set items, Abak's Bloody Dagger, was last seen near Kunlan Town over ten years ago. The old Mage Ligen probably knows some clues about its whereabouts.

The leather chest piece of the Tyrant Abak Set has long since

been broken beyond repair. According to rumours, a random wanderer put the chest piece up for auction in the main auction house at the heart of Calore for 2 silver, where it was purchased by Earl Kleinfeld.

....

The list of clues would lead Nie Yan to finding this set. Of course, there would be difficulties along the way.

Because it was a Legendary set, Nie Yan knew he was not yet strong enough to go after it, no matter how simple the clues made it out to be. However, this set was definitely powerful beyond all of his expectations. Back when he was a Level 180 Great Thief, just a Sub Legendary set was good enough to be called godly equipment. Legendary sets were just a myth. After all, even the best players would only have one or two pieces of Legendary equipment. No one dared to even dream of gathering a complete set of Legendary items!

## Chapter 241 – Buried History

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Nie Yan flipped to the fourth page of the book, wondering what sort of materials were used to create such durable pages. The page densely packed with ancient characters from the Era of Shared Governance was detailed to a rarely seen degree. It contained techniques which allowed a player to advance to a Great Thief and Shadow Dancer, practice exercises to hone those techniques, methods to sharpen the player's awareness as a Thief, and so on. A person in possession of this information could increase their combat strength at least several fold. Many things on this page couldn't be found in the videos of his past life. There were even some techniques that he had never seen Sun or Shadow Killer employ.

This was the most comprehensive guide on how to become a Great Thief and Shadow Dancer!

With this guide, there was no longer a need for a player to go about blindly figuring out things for themselves. There were over a hundred techniques altogether, including those Nie Yan was familiar with like the beginner, middle, and advanced footwork of Shadow Dance and Dance of Death. Just mastering two or three of them would allow him to roam around unimpeded, while mastering five or six would allow him to look down on the world from high atop the peak.

Nie Yan had no intention of learning all of these techniques. Just having five or six of them handy was enough. Besides, some of the things described in this guide were simply too difficult for the current him to pull off.

The fifth page contained long forgotten secrets such as the whereabouts of Sage Grant's equipment set or the origins of the Somodo Greatsword. There were also mentions of the Water of Life and Sacred Potions.

There was information on every mythical item that had ever appeared in the history of the Atlanta continent.

After skimming through, Nie Yan flipped to the next page.

On the sixth page was a mystical star design with an enchanting glow. As soon as Nie Yan set his eyes on the page, the star flashed with a dazzling radiance, and a projection of the star appeared in his mind. A flood of information related to past eras surged into his head, catching him off-guard.

He could only passively accept all of this knowledge. It took quite some time before he had finally absorbed all of it.

You have received All Knowing.

You have received the 'Grand Scholar' title.

A skill and a title...? Nie Yan quickly looked at his skill window,

and noticed that a new passive skill was added—All Knowing. As he read through the description, he discovered that this passive came with a host of benefits. The first was a 200% boost to his Intelligence; it was unfortunate that he was a Thief and not a Mage, so this was not all that useful to him. The second benefit was that he directly learned the languages of the elves, beastmen, and any other race that belonged to the Righteous Faction of Order. Finally, it granted him the supplementary ability to divine the future of the game world once every ten days, such as major changes in an empire or historical events yet to occur. As for the Grand Scholar title, it raised his Influence in all nations by 50, allowed him the use of any transfer point free of charge, and he would enjoy the protection of any guard within a 50-meter radius while in a town or city. He was also given the privilege of riding a mount inside a city, and he even held the authority to order the guards to punish any character below the rank of viscount!

Any NPC or player with the rank of baron or lower would have to maintain a deferential attitude in front of Nie Yan. If such a person insulted his honour, depending on the severity of the offense and how much Influence the offender held, they could be jailed for anywhere between one to five days! This punishment was especially severe for a player. During this time, they wouldn't be able to level at all! All they could do was helplessly pass the time in a jail cell!

This was the power of the Grand Scholar title, possessing supreme authority!

From now on, Nie Yan was privileged nobility. The benefits of most titles only had an effect in a specific city or nation. However, Grand Scholar was different; its benefits would always apply

whether he was in the Viridian Empire or Satreen Empire.

Even the chief administrators, who held immense authority in their respective cities, didn't easily dare to offend a person with the title of Scholar. It was because such a figure had the ability to divine the future!

Nie Yan's lips curved into a sinister grin when he read through the part about being able to throw those who offended him in jail. A devious plot began forming in his mind. So long as he wasn't the first one to throw out insults, he would be able to watch a good show if he could bait Heaven Breaker into cursing at him.

It was a pity that this trick would only work once. However, Nie Yan felt that was plenty. The resulting psychological blow from such a public humiliation would have a far greater effect than the actual punishment itself.

Any Grand Scholar whose divinations aided the Viridian and Satreen Empires in averting heavy losses in several major battles against the forces seeking to plunge the world into darkness would receive the title of Augur!

Flipping to the seventh page, Nie Yan saw an illustration of a gallant stallion clad in thick, metal barding framed by a magic runic circle. It was a spell which allowed the player to summon this warhorse as a mount.

Nie Yan couldn't help but be shocked. It was a Faulkner Warhorse, named after the Faulkner Prairies from which they

originated. These horses were known as the royal steed, and were as fast as the wind with a movement speed bonus of 300%. In the previous timeline, even the cheapest horse sold for the sky-high price of 50 gold, to say nothing of a luxurious mount like the Faulkner Warhorse, which was exclusively available to those of extremely high status. Faulkners raised in the royal stables sold for more than 50,000 gold. However, gold alone was not enough to purchase one of these mounts. There was an additional requirement, which was that the buyer needed to either possess at minimum the rank of a marquis or have at least 50 Influence in Calore!

Meeting either of these two requirements was as difficult as scaling the tallest peaks. Even the leaders of the major guilds in the previous timeline could only look on with envy at such an expensive mount.

Nie Yan wanted to see what this Faulkner Warhorse was like after summoning it, but this wasn't the appropriate place.

After looking through the seventh page, Nie Yan realized there was one more page left.

When he flipped to the eighth page, it blossomed out with a brilliant radiance.

Within the light, Nie Yan saw a massive army in an ancient battlefield, countless majestic towers, and demons and angels battling in the sky above... Scene after scene flashed past his eyes, as though he was warped back in time to experience these distant eras firsthand. The very history of the world was recounted to him

in great detail. A desolate bleakness...

Everything he witnessed had long since disappeared due to the merciless passage of time.

Announcement: Volume I of the Book of Order has been opened. A hallowed radiance illuminates the world. The Buried History expansion will be released shortly!

Announcement: The game will go down in one hour to undergo patching. Please be advised that all players must be logged off by then.

Below the announcements was a detailed introduction on the Era of Shared Governance. This was the ushering in of a new era. The Viridian and Satreen Empires would allow the unrestricted sale of land-based mounts to players. The knights of both empires rejoiced in triumph as they expelled the creatures of evil.

Following the release of the expansion, several changes would be implemented into the game to give newcomers a chance to catch up. The experience required to level up at lower levels would be dramatically reduced. The drop rate of in-game currency, along with both low-level skill books and equipment ranked Gold and Dark Gold, would be increased. There would also be the successive releases of basic strongholds, with five appearing in the first batch, all of which were guarded by evil creatures. Ownership of these



strongholds would be given to whoever cleared them. Aside from this, places like the Elemental Hall and Holy Shrine would allow advanced magic to be learned without going through any tedious prequests, and the difficulty of the associated trials would be reduced, though only slightly. At the same time, a slew of quest lines related to the Buried History expansion, which ranged from Level 60–120, would become available. Even though the speed of levelling was increased, it would still be a long time before anyone could start them.

Nie Yan never expected flipping to the eighth page would trigger the release of the Buried History expansion. He was endlessly vexed. Yet another major deviation in the timeline had occurred! Had he known this would happen, he would have never looked at the last page! That way future events would still be a bit easier to predict! Although he believed the early release of the Buried History expansion was inevitable after he completed Volume I of the Book of Order, he never thought it would happen like this!

The simple action of flipping a page had influenced the course of the entire game!

A huge uproar occurred in the outside world.

“What the hell? Which guy opened the first volume of the book of something?”

“Who knows.”

“I heard levelling is going to become a bit easier after the release

of the expansion. I wonder if that's really true."

The sudden release of an expansion caught the players off-guard. They were discussing fervently, trying to guess the identity of the person who triggered this. All the teams that were about to run a dungeon had no choice but to turn back, while those already in the middle of a run sped up their pace, though an hour's time was plenty for a full clear.

Every major city and town was crowded with players. Everyone was talking about the shocking announcement. Since people learned that levelling would become much easier after the release of the expansion, no one was out levelling right now, instead taking the time to relax and stroll around.

「Nie Yan, were those announcements triggered by you?」Guo Huai asked. He knew Nie Yan was in possession of some of the chapters from the Book of Order, but he wasn't too clear on the details

「Yeah, it was me. When everyone gets back online tomorrow, I want you to quickly gather six hundred of the top players in the guild,」Nie Yan said. Since the release of the expansion couldn't be stopped, he might as well take advantage of the opportunity to seize some benefits; otherwise, it would be too much of a loss.

「Alright, that won't be a problem,」Guo Huai replied. He understood that Nie Yan probably wanted to do something important.

「Also, I want you to find Heaven Breaker's location for me. Is he in Calore right now? If so, immediately report it to me!」Nie Yan said. He was about to carry out his devious plan. Knowing Heaven Breaker's fiery temper, it would be a piece of cake. As for Nightbreak Trickster, from what he understood of this person's personality in the previous timeline, it wouldn't be so easy to dupe him.

「Why are you looking for him?」Guo Huai asked in shock. There was nothing that could be done to Heaven Breaker in the city. Could it be that Nie Yan was planning to negotiate with him?

「I'm going to make him fall flat on his face. Watch carefully.」Nie Yan chuckled. The expansion was a rare opportunity for rapid growth. Especially considering that the stronghold battle between Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame was going to start in a few days, if he could get Heaven Breaker locked up in jail during that time, it would greatly improve their chances of victory.

「Alright, I'll immediately find out and report back to you,」Guo Huai said. Even though he had no idea what Nie Yan was planning, he knew that Heaven Breaker was probably going to suffer sorely just based on how mysterious Nie Yan was acting. He knew Nie Yan was a person who wouldn't do something unless it was guaranteed to succeed. He couldn't help but get somewhat excited. Heaven Breaker was most likely going to walk right into whatever trap Nie Yan had set for him.

Before long, Guo Huai reported back to Nie Yan. Heaven Breaker was currently at the main auction house in the heart of Calore with a group of people.

「Shadow Killer is with him too!」Guo Huai said. He was quite alarmed when he heard this piece of information.

Nie Yan narrowed his eyes before letting out a light laugh.「That's not a problem. There's no harm in having an extra audience member to enjoy the show.」

## Chapter 242 – City Guards

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「What are they doing at the center of Calore?」Nie Yan brainstormed ways of provoking Heaven Breaker as he headed in their direction. Unfortunately, not much came to mind. I'm really not suited for these kinds of things.

「They might be buying something at the auction house,」Guo Huai said, though he too could only guess.

Suddenly, a lightbulb lit up in Nie Yan's mind: Rather than looking for Heaven Breaker at the auction house, why not instead just run straight to his headquarters?

Needless to say, someone as influential as Nie Yan just showing himself in front of Victorious Return's headquarters would cause quite a large scene—precisely what he wanted.

A devilish smile formed on Nie Yan's face. Hehe, I won't even have to say a word. Just my being there will lead to them firing off a slew of insults. When they do, and the city guards would just happen to be nearby...

Now that would truly be a sight to behold.

「Have someone tell Heaven Breaker that I'm heading over to his guild headquarters.」Nie Yan thought for a bit, then added, 「Actually, send Undying Scoundrel and tell him to hold nothing back. Tell him to treat Heaven Breaker like family. The more annoying he is the better.」

「Got it,」Guo Huai replied. He knew Nie Yan had something prepared for Heaven Breaker, and also knew that it would be even better if Undying Scoundrel irked Heaven Breaker.

Guo Huai conveyed these words to Undying Scoundrel while Nie Yan changed directions and marched straight towards Victorious Return's headquarters.

「That's all? Ain't that easy? Just tell the boss to sit back and relax,」Undying Scoundrel said. How could he possibly miss out on such an opportunity? Provoking Heaven Breaker... what could be more exhilarating than this?

「Heaven Breaker's at the city center's auction house. Don't waste any time and do it quick. The Boss is waiting after all.」

「No worries, I got this.」

After delegating the task, he carefully monitored the situation around the auction house at the center of Calore. It was much more active here than before, but the Tier 9 expansion brought about by the auction house lowered the feeling of crowdedness inside.

A few players crowded in a distant corner glanced toward the middle, their voices low as they spoke. Some twenty people forcefully reserved almost sixty of the best seats, driving away anyone that approached them. It went without saying that there were not many who wanted Victorious Return's ire, so they

allowed themselves to be shooed away. None of them enjoyed being stuck in an endless loop of being chased and killed—something well within Victorious Return’s capabilities.

“Look, that’s Heaven Breaker, Victorious Return’s guild leader.”

“Who’s that Thief next to him? He looks pretty strong.”

Shadow Killer, armed with his Shrapnel Set and a glaring red name, drew quite a few curious eyes.

A split second later, he donned a dark cloak, concealing his appearance amid the darkness.

“Don’t know, never seen him before.”

Despite Shadow Killer’s reputation, very few actually knew what he looked like. The reasons were twofold: First, he generally avoided attention, though that wasn’t the main factor. The main reason was the fact he only targeted high-profile personnel. Which one of them would freely send out recordings of their own death? It would do nothing but put shame to their names, particularly so due to their positions. Since there weren’t many recordings of Shadow Killer, it was natural players didn’t recognize him.

“The main targets in this siege are Nirvana Flame and Sleepy Fox, also Fa Lan if he shows up. How confident are you?” Heaven Breaker looked to the person beside him. His eyes were hidden behind a cloak, while his entire being seemed to ooze with killing

intent.

“You want all three?” asked Shadow Killer, his tone flat.

“During the stronghold battle, focus on Sleepy Fox and put aside Nirvana Flame to deal with later,” Heaven Breaker instructed. Though he wished the very worst for Nie Yan, he understood that Sleepy Fox was a higher priority target in this siege because of his status as Holy Empire’s guild leader. He also knew that despite having an overall smaller impact, Nie Yan nonetheless commanded a great deal of strength and influence. Leaving Nie Yan alone would no doubt affect the battles as well.

Shadow Killer nodded and said no more.

They hadn’t expected for some Buried History expansion to come out all of a sudden, just days before the stronghold battle. Neither of them knew how this would affect the flow and results of the battle to come.

Heaven Breaker had just received an equipment blueprint that asked for special types of ores. If he could gear up 180 of his members with this equipment before the start of the stronghold battle, it would prove to be a fantastic boost to the guild’s strength. This was one of the reasons he came to the auction house—to purchase large amounts of raw materials. The other was to get ahold of Shadow Killer and discuss some terms. His bounty for Sleepy Fox was 800 gold, while Nie Yan’s reached a whopping 2,000; it was a truly absurd amount.



It was at this very moment that a person with complete disregard of his surroundings walked straight up to Heaven Breaker and Shadow Killer. His expression was one that lacked any sort of seriousness.

Needless to say, it was Undying Scoundrel.

The players of Victorious Return hadn't reacted in time to stop him, nor did they dare as he hadn't done anything beyond the usual set of actions that'd allow them to attack him without the city's guards retaliating.

It was this reason alone that Undying Scoundrel felt no fear despite being surrounded by enemies.

It truly was a feeling beyond compare to irritate none other than the leader of Victorious Return, Heaven Breaker.

"Hai there, my good brother. Wassup?" Undying Scoundrel grinned, trying to be as irritating as possible.

A solemn expression gloomed over Heaven Breaker; there had never been anyone who dared to speak to him like that.

The players from Victorious Return looked at each other, all confused. Is this person Heaven Breaker's friend? With that thought lingering in their minds, none of them even dared to stop Undying Scoundrel.

“Who’s that guy?”

“I don’t know, but I feel like I’ve seen him before. Just can’t remember where though...”

“I remember! That’s Undying Scoundrel! He’s a player from Asskickers United!”

“Is he a mole the boss planted in their guild?”

“Get lost!” Heaven Breaker never expected some oblivious fool would dare to so rudely disturb him.

“Tsk, tsk... Don’t be like that. I was just passing by, and when I saw you I thought I should say hello to a good friend. My boss told us to think of you guys as our brothers, as though we’re all family. Isn’t it fine to skip the formalities with close relatives? There’s no reason for you to act so coldly, is there?” Undying Scoundrel asked, grinning from ear to ear.

Heaven Breaker also realized what was going on. This person was from Asskickers United! What’s more, he was one of the ten from Kiln Fire Woods!

Undying Scoundrel could be considered a small-time celebrity now.

“Screw off and go back to your boss! Tell him that small fries shouldn’t get cocky. I’ll deal with him sooner rather than later,”

Heaven Breaker spat coldly.

“Hey, hey! How can you speak like that? My boss is a kind and tolerant person. His heart is as vast as the ocean, and his handsome, glowing appearance even puts the moon to shame. How dare you treat him like some kind of villain!? This is slander! How can you tarnish the image of my boss, a virtuous soul who receives the affection and reverence of all...?” Undying Scoundrel chattered on. He was a buzzing housefly, putting on a brilliant show as he riled the other side up. The more he spoke, the more carefree his words became.

Seeing that Undying Scoundrel was being ridiculous and had no intention of leaving, Heaven Breaker looked at his subordinates and ordered, “Come, shoo this undying housefly away!”

Heaven Breaker fumed inwardly at what he saw as Asskickers United’s intolerable bullying.

According to the rules of the city, if a player bothered a major figure such as the leader of a large guild, that leader had the right to perform minor disciplinary actions such as having the person dragged away.

Two Victorious Return musclemen immediately came forward, grabbed Undying Scoundrel by his arms, and frogmarched him out of the auction house.

“Oh right! Brother Heaven Breaker, I almost forgot to tell you! My boss is preparing to give your headquarters a visit and enjoy

your hospitality. Make sure you have tea ready for him by the time he gets there.” Undying Scoundrel was secretly ecstatic to see Heaven Breaker about to blow his lid like a boiling kettle. He had always been carrying a belly-full of anger knowing that some of the brothers in the guild were actually spies for Victorious Return. What frustrated him even more was that he didn’t know how many there were. But today, he finally got to let off some steam. He had to admit, irritating Heaven Breaker to no end felt even more refreshing than simply cursing at him.

Heaven Breaker, hearing Undying Scoundrel’s words, took on an unsightly expression. Nie Yan visiting the Victorious Return headquarters certainly meant he was up to no good.

“We return to our headquarters!” Heaven Breaker announced. He refused to believe that Nie Yan could accomplish much while in Calore. However, since Nie Yan dared to go to his headquarters, Heaven Breaker couldn’t possibly not show.

Shadow Killer’s eyes flashed with a gloomy, mysterious light as he touched the handle of the dagger strapped to his waist. Mad Rogue, let’s see if you’re really worthy of being my target.

A crowd of fuming Victorious Return players rushed back to their guild headquarters. They wanted to see just what Nie Yan was up to.

“I’m serious. I’m only here because I want to sit down and have a chat with Heaven Breaker,” Nie Yan said with an innocent expression on his face.

“Fuck off! Only a dumbass would believe that. [Beat it!](#) Don’t think we’re afraid of touching you!” a Victorious Return player shouted, shaking his fists. So long as Nie Yan dared to enter their guild headquarters which was a private area, they could immediately do with him as they pleased.

“Scram!”

Nie Yan leisurely awaited the arrival of Heaven Breaker, wondering what sort tactic he should employ to infuriate him while still having the laws of Calore on his side. Deep in thought on this issue, he spotted a group of players in the distance aggressively moving in his direction. Leading them was none other than Heaven Breaker.

Nie Yan’s lips curved into a smile. He had been waiting for quite a while. Seeing the crowd storm over, he was just about to open his mouth to speak when Heaven Breaker cut him off, “Nirvana Flame, you motherfucker! Don’t think your Asskickers United is invincible! This is the territory of Victorious Return. You think you can just show up hereuninvited? Get the fuck out of my sight right now!”

Nie Yan was stunned speechless. He spent nearly half a day without success trying to think up a surefire plan that would provoke Heaven Breaker into cursing at him. After all, quarrelling with others wasn’t his speciality. Little did he know that all that effort would go to waste. Heaven Breaker fell hook, line, and sinker with no effort on his part. He couldn’t help but wonder what Undying Scoundrel did to get Heaven Breaker so riled up, to

the extent that he would hurl out abuse immediately after seeing him!

Heaven Breaker was a born gangster. Receiving anything but profanities was as difficult as scaling the heavens, especially after he suffered under Undying Scoundrel's harassment back at the auction house. Even now, he was still fuming. When he spotted Nie Yan arrogantly idling around his guild headquarters, he couldn't hold back any longer, venting out all his pent-up anger.

Nie Yan raised up both his hands. "I just came here for a stroll. I didn't expect you guys to be so unwelcoming."

The players from Victorious Return were unfazed by Nie Yan's words, only feeling that he deserved a good beating. They swore at him even more ruthlessly. As people who were unruly by nature, with little to no upbringing, they used increasingly vulgar language.

Nie Yan swept his gaze over Heaven Breaker's entourage before noticing a person in a black cloak standing far off in the back. He raised his eyebrows in surprise. It was Shadow Killer!

This guy was watching the events unfold from the sidelines!

The two people locked eyes as sparks flew in the air.

Nie Yan averted his eyes, then turned back to face Heaven Breaker along with the crowd and said with a ridiculing smile,

“Have you guys had enough fun cursing at me?”

Just as Nie Yan’s voice fell, a deluge of fully armed Calore guards clad in golden armour poured into the street. Most of them were Level 60–70 Elites. Some were even stronger. They surrounded the players from Victorious Return, and gave off an intimidating aura that struck fear into the hearts of all people.

In an instant, the players from Victorious Return were left wide-eyed and speechless. Just what did they do to attract the ire of the city guards?

## Chapter 243 – Faulkner Warhorse

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A guard in golden imperial armour approached Nie Yan, and asked in a deferential tone, “Sir Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar, Captain Quinn of the Calore guards greets you. How may this lowly one serve you today?” He didn’t dare to neglect the person in front of him in the slightest.

Everyone saw how the guard captain treated Nie Yan with great respect.

The crowd of Victorious Return players dropped their jaws after witnessing the guard captain’s attitude. All of them were stunned on the spot.

Demon Hunter? Grand Scholar? What sort of titles were these?

Although they were aware Nie Yan was formidable—possessing a great degree of Influence in Calore, to the extent he could walk around freely with a red name—they never expected him to hold a title that even let him order around the guards!

With such a large group of high-level guards surrounding them, the players from Victorious Return were scared witless. Quaking in their boots and fearing the worst, they were terrified about what might happen next.

Nie Yan’s icy gaze swept over the crowd of players, sending chills down their spines.



“Captain Quinn, I’ve endured unwarranted verbal abuse from these people. According to the laws of Calore, what is the punishment for insulting a Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar?” Nie Yan asked. Now that he had the enemy in the palm of his hand, how could he possibly let them off lightly?

“Sir, the law states that all accomplices will be thrown into jail for one to five days, while the main offender must serve for at least three days. Harsher penalties may be imposed if they attempt to resist,” Captain Quinn succinctly replied before looking over the crowd, his imposing aura dispelling any thoughts of putting up a fight.

At their current level, facing off against Level 60–70 Elite Guards was simply suicidal.

Even if they logged off right now, they would just be arrested the moment they came back online. If they turned tail and fled, they would be labelled as wanted fugitives. An arrest warrant would be issued out in every town and city, and they would forever be on the lam. It didn’t stop here, they would also be attacked on sight by every NPC belonging to the imperial army.

Under these circumstances, they could only allow themselves to be arrested by the guards.

Only now did Heaven Breaker realize that he had been tricked. This was the enemy’s plan all along. He didn’t expect that even his foul mouth would be used as a weapon against him. His face sank

as he stared daggers at Nie Yan with a wolf-like gaze. He hadn't fully lost his sense of reason. He was aware that opening his mouth right now would only invite further trouble. If he had an outburst, who knew how many more days he would spend locked up in jail? He suppressed the endless rage in his heart.

Nie Yan was extremely satisfied with this outcome. The results were perfect. Heaven Breaker and many of his experts and high level personnel would be thrown in jail. No one who cursed at him was spared! Without the leadership of the higher-ups, Victorious Return would sink into complete disorder!

I should call up Guo Huai and Sleepy Fox after this. If we're going to make a move, now is the best time!

The war between Asskickers United and Victorious Return was no holds barred from the start. Both sides used any means possible to deal with each other.

When Heaven Breaker was released from jail three days later, the stronghold battle would be long over!

"I request these people be punished to the fullest extent of the law. Throw them in jail," Nie Yan said. The guards stepped forward, and began arresting almost everyone standing in front of the guild headquarters entrance. Over 160 players were taken away. Who knew if the Calore jail cells could hold them all.

Nie Yan couldn't help but think he scored big this time.

The street outside the guild headquarters entrance returned to its usual calm after the commotion was over.

Even their guild leader was taken away, so how could the remaining players dare to continue provoking Nie Yan?

Nie Yan turned to look at the cloaked figure in the distance. Shadow Killer noticed his gaze and stared back. He revealed an indifferent smile, as though everything that just transpired had nothing to do with him, before vanishing like a wisp of smoke.

Nie Yan scanned his surroundings, but he could no longer find any traces of Shadow Killer's presence. It was as if this person had never been there in the first place!

What a formidable stealthing ability!

Shadow Killer never just revealed himself in front of people. This was him provoking Nie Yan!

Nie Yan understood that if he ever encountered Shadow Killer in the wilderness some day, a fierce battle would definitely take place. The boss of the number one gaming organization in the nation... he was eager to see just how strong this mythical figure was.

Nie Yan was inwardly delighted. Heaven Breaker suffered a defeat at his hands yet again. With that explosive temper of his, who knew how long he could last in jail? This time, Victorious

Return fell face-first into the mud, leaving them in a wretched state. He cast a glance at their guild headquarters one more time before departing for the Starry Night Potion Shop.

Before long, Nie Yan was bombarded with calls.

「Amazing! You really are something... You actually got Heaven Breaker tossed into jail. It looks like he won't be able to participate in the stronghold battle tomorrow!」Sleepy Fox exclaimed. It went without saying that Radiant Sacred Flame was going to rely on Victorious Return. Due to the relationship between these two large guilds, Victorious Return would definitely send over their top forces to lend support. But now, over half their elites had been locked up in jail by Nie Yan, with many of them being unable to get out in time to participate in the stronghold battle. This instantly increased Holy Empire and Asskickers United's chances of victory by over 30%!

「You're sure it's tomorrow?」Nie Yan asked. Due to the release of the Buried History expansion, he expected some things would be shifted to an earlier date such as the stronghold battle.

「Yes, I just received confirmation. Tomorrow at 21:00, don't be late,」Sleepy Fox replied. He now felt more confident than ever about seizing the stronghold.

Nie Yan nodded.「Don't worry. We'll be on time.」

Guo Huai was next to contact him.

「Nie Yan, I just received a report from a subordinate. You sure are fierce, getting Heaven Breaker put behind bars like that. The whole guild is practically bursting out in cheers,」Guo Huai said emotionally. He recalled how much they had suffered at the hands of Victorious Return. Nie Yan had done well to settle the score since then.

Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, and the others also lit up his voice com. Each and every one of them was endlessly excited. Getting Heaven Breaker put away, Nie Yan's actions this time around were simply too satisfying!

Nie Yan broke out into a faint smile when he saw how excited everyone got. He shifted his attention away from the chat to the scene around him as he travelled back and forth through narrow alleyways until he reached a secluded area. He found this place where no player was even remotely close to because he wanted to check out his new mount.

Nie Yan started chanting, calling forth his mount from the Glimpse of Darkness. After a bright flash illuminated the gloomy alley, a towering steed emerged before him.

This Faulkner Warhorse looked just like the ones Nie Yan saw in videos during his past life. It had a reddish brown coat without the slightest blemish, outlining a robust frame which brimmed with power, and onyx-black eyes which sparkled with intelligence. It was a good bit taller than him, and looked ready to charge into battle with its sparkling, silver armour.

The Faulkner Warhorse snorted, blowing out hot air, before

bowing its head. It rubbed its muzzle against Nie Yan's body, as though seeking his affection.

Nie Yan gently stroke the horse's neck, a sense of familiarity arising in his heart. Since it was his summon, there existed a telepathic link between them which allowed him to command it with a single thought.

"Hey, partner. From now on, you'll be my mount," Nie Yan mumbled. This Faulkner Warhorse was quite intelligent.

Nie Yan examined the Faulkner Warhorse's information. Just like for the vast majority of mounts, this one didn't allow for mounted combat. Not that this was all that surprising to Nie Yan. There were only a very special few that could. Of course, these types of mounts were even more expensive.

The Faulkner Warhorse increased movement speed by 300% while being ridden. It was precisely this movement speed bonus that made the Faulkner so highly-prized. An ordinary mount that could increase movement speed by even 100% was already considered an extremely rare sight.

A mount allowed a player to save much precious time. Countless hours which would've been wasted travelling by foot could instead be spent on levelling, giving the player an edge over others. This held especially true for travel between cities and towns. Owning a mount could save the player a lot on travelling expenses.

This gallant steed was capable of traversing a thousand miles in a

single day, providing Nie Yan with fast transport between large maps. As for travel between cities and towns, he had no need for the Faulkner Warhorse, since all transfer fees were waived thanks to his Grand Scholar title. He could even make a visit to the Satreen Empire's King City to purchase a few exotic items.

Hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, Nie Yan recalled the Faulkner Warhorse. He headed for the Starry Night Potion Shop, passing by many player-owned shops along the way. There were potion shops, equipment shops, general shops, and so on. Although none of them were at a very high tier, it was at least proof that Calore's commerce was slowly growing.

So far, Nie Yan had opened up several dozen shops in major cities across the Viridian Empire. These included potion shops, tinkerer shops, and so on. Due to the Demon Hunter title, Bird Leaves No Eggs received a great amount of preferential treatment when applying to start a business on Nie Yan's behalf. Now that Nie Yan held the Great Scholar title in addition to this, who would dare to cause trouble in his place of business? Anyone who did would get dragged away by the guards. No one would be that foolish.

Aside from these several dozen shops, Nie Yan still had a few open plots of land he planned to lease out to people for a decent price. In the last few days, he had over a dozen visitors who approached him about this matter. But they hadn't moved past the initial negotiations just yet. Nie Yan told Bird to wait until the real-world currency exchange went live before settling anything. This was because the Currency Conversion Hall would be opened near the Starry Night Potion Shop, and all the surrounding shops would soar in value. At that time, the leasing price would definitely rise as well. By just collecting rent, Nie Yan would already be able to

earn a huge profit.

Aside from this, his level had dropped to a miserable state. He could only wait until he returned online to get it back up.

After the expansion was fully released tomorrow, it was crucial that Nie Yan finished all his preparations.

The release of the Buried History expansion was akin to opening Pandora's box. Who knew what the future would have in store for him. Nie Yan could only steadily observe the changes.

Checking the progress of the virtual property auction, Nie Yan found his bids for the auction house at the heart of Calore and the Mercenary Auction House still standing on top. He could still observe any changes to bids with his phone after getting off the game.

This whole time, Nie Yan was still amassing funds. He currently had over 6,000 gold at his disposal. It was enough snatch away the two auction houses he was eying. He wasn't worried about any competition emerging.

Nie Yan arrived at the Starry Night Potion Shop and finished most preparations. Seeing that it was about time for the servers to go down, he logged off.



## Chapter 244 – Meeting Xie Yao Again

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Nie Yan put down the game helmet on the side of his bed. Today was the first day of the school year. As a newly enrolled transfer student, he was allowed to start a few days later than everyone else in order to get settled into his new environment. But he badly wanted to see Xie Yao again, so he packed his bag before heading off for school.

Nie Yan's parents, who had gone off to work early in the morning, left breakfast for him on the table. Since the company was just established, there were a lot of matters to attend to.

In the previous timeline, Nie Yan felt neglected being left in the villa all by himself, causing his juvenile mind to develop a rebellious personality. He vowed he would never repeat his past mistakes with this new life that was given to him.

A 50-year-old chauffeur awaited Nie Yan at the villa entrance and drove him to school.

Huahai Affiliated High School, a place very familiar to Nie Yan; it held many memories he still cherished even after a lifetime.

The school campus was beautiful, a shaded pathway enclosed by dense shrubbery and flowers along with a flowing miniature creek. Osmanthus trees lined both sides in a neat row. Even though they weren't yet in bloom, Nie Yan recalled how their fragrance filled the school grounds.

Everything was just as he remembered.

Although there were some slight differences, many things were pretty much identical to the previous timeline. History only began to slightly deviate when Nie Yan awoke in the past.

Many students were already milling around in the third-year classroom of Class 3. It was the beginning of the new semester, so everyone was busily reconnecting after the summer break. Gathered in cliques, they were having lively discussions. Only after the bell rang would they finally settle down for class.

This was a multimedia classroom, with computers molded into the shape of desk and seat. Sitting was very comfortable. The facilities here were clearly better than the ones in Nie Yan's old school back in Ningjiang.

Nie Yan's eyes scanned through the crowd before finally stopping on a familiar face. She wore a bright yellow blouse and a light blue skirt, and glowed with a youthful radiance. Her beautiful smile was especially dazzling. She was like a crane among a flock of hens.

She was surrounded by eight female classmates. They were happily chatting about what they did over the summer holidays.

Xie Yao's image resonated with the one engraved in his heart. After seeing her again, Nie Yan could no longer remain calm.

Even though Nie Yan had matured into an adult, the feelings that

accumulated over two lifetimes had increasingly weighed on him.

Only after a long while did Nie Yan finally suppress the feelings in his heart. He walked toward Xie Yao.

Xie Yao noticed an inconspicuous young man approaching her and looked at him with a curious glint. She felt he was extremely familiar, as though they had met somewhere before. But when she carefully examined his appearance, nobody came to mind.

“Hi,” Nie Yan greeted.

Xie Yao nodded, then asked with a somewhat doubtful expression, “Hi, have we met somewhere before? You are...?”

“I’m Nie Yan (聶言). That’s Nie with a double ‘ear’ (耳), and the Yan in ‘language’ (語言),” Nie Yan introduced himself.

“Oh! It’s you!” Xie Yao exclaimed. She wore an expression of amazement along with pleasant surprise. She recalled the time they first met in Ninjiang, and how she mistook him for a middle schooler back then. But now, he looked like a completely different person—much taller, and more muscular too.

Nie Yan laughed. “You’ve remembered. I just transferred to this school, and happened to end up in this class. I’m your new classmate, so please treat me kindly.”

“What a coincidence! Welcome!” Xie Yao said in a cheerful tone.

When she looked at Nie Yan, another figure popped into her mind—someone she knew from a game, who led a powerful band of experts and took the virtual world by storm. She didn't know what corner of the planet this mysterious player lived in, but she couldn't help but feel that these two people were somewhat alike. As her thoughts turned to this person she deeply admired, ripples surfaced in her heart and her cheeks flushed red.

“Thank you.” Nie Yan nodded.

A female classmate standing beside Xie Yao nudged her and asked in a gossipy tone, “Ah? Xie Yao, who is he?”

“Right! Tell us! He's tall, and kinda cute... Wait! Don't tell us he's your boyfriend!?” another female classmate chimed in, covering her mouth with one hand as she giggled.

“No, stop speaking nonsense! He's just a friend I met not long ago,” Xie Yao exclaimed in embarrassment, then turned to Nie Yan with an apologetic smile. “Sorry, they always blabber like this. Don't mind them.”

A student who noticed this scene unfolding from the other side of the classroom walked over.

Nie Yan's expression turned frosty when he saw this person. Destiny would inevitably force enemies to cross paths again. The grievances between him and Liu Rui weren't something easily explained in a few short sentences. In the previous timeline, were it not for Liu Rui constantly putting him down, he wouldn't have

developed such a low self-esteem. Whether in terms of background, appearance, or studies, he always lost to Liu Rui. It was only after he matured into an adult that he realized none of these things mattered at all in the face of true love. However, by the time he understood this truth of life, Xie Yao was already taken away from him.

In this life, Nie Yan would take back everything he lost. He would crush Liu Rui beneath his feet, and all the bullying he received in his past life would be paid back in full.

“Hello, who might you be?” Liu Rui offered his hand, revealing what he thought was a bright and elegant smile.

“Hello, my name is Nie Yan. I’m a new transfer student.” Nie Yan shook hands with Liu Rui in a graceful manner. Now that he had a more mature outlook on life, he understood some actions no matter how superficial still needed to be done, even more so since he was in front of Xie Yao.

“No wonder. So you and Xie Yao have met before?” Liu Rui asked. When he looked at Nie Yan, a feeling of crisis arose in his heart. This was a formidable rival!

“We’ve met once prior to this.” Nie Yan chuckled. He wore a natural expression, and didn’t display the slightest bit of hostility.

Liu Rui internally sighed with relief. He initially believed Nie Yan was Xie Yao’s childhood friend or something of the kind. It turned out they were just acquaintances.

Xie Yao revealed an annoyed expression. What right did Liu Rui have to pry into her personal matters? She used to have a somewhat favourable opinion of him, feeling he was a talented individual who could do anything flawlessly. But as her horizons broadened, she realized those more outstanding than him could be found everywhere. His glaring flaws grew increasingly apparent—vain, prideful, conceited, and possessive. All these traits filled her with disgust.

Nie Yan casually chatted with the classmates around him. All of them had a good impression of him. They felt he was charming, humorous, and laid-back.

“Nie Yan, do you practice Taekwondo? You’re really muscular,” a female classmate asked.

“No, I’ve never practiced Taekwondo, though I’ve trained in kickboxing and some other mixed martial arts,” Nie Yan replied. As a young adult, if he had never learned a martial art, he would definitely be looked down on.

“Kickboxing is more focused on real combat. Can you really fight?” the female classmate asked as her eyes sparkled. She felt men who practiced kickboxing were a bit more attractive.

“You do kickboxing? I was taught some of the basics by Teacher Yang, how about we spar some?” Liu Rui interjected. While chatting with everyone, he discovered the spotlight had been snatched away from him, so he was desperate to get it back.

Xie Yao's limpid eyes curiously gazed at Nie Yan. She felt he was quite mysterious. He was nothing like the scrawny kid she previously met. It was hard to imagine these two were actually the same person.

"Teacher Yang..." several female classmates quietly exclaimed.

After hearing Liu Rui's proposal, Nie Yan's eyes flashed with a cold light. Brat, I've been waiting for you to say that for a long time. In the previous timeline, he was repeatedly provoked by Liu Rui in PE until he finally broke and fought him. Of course, he was beaten miserably and suffered heavy injuries. Liu Rui had knocked him to the ground and stepped on his neck until he admitted defeat, humiliating him in front of everyone. This dealt a huge blow to his psyche, leading to him not appearing in school for almost a month.

Liu Rui was the teacher's assistant. Whether it was kickboxing or Taekwondo, he was proficient in both. So how could the Nie Yan from back then possibly be his match!? Liu Rui had somehow found out he had a crush on Xie Yao, so he purposefully took the opportunity to humiliate him during that PE class!

Brat, this time, it's you delivering yourself to me! Nie Yan thought. He was the frequent target of bullying by Liu Rui in his past life. In this one, he would return everything with interest!

Liu Rui was stunned as he happened to notice the brief change in Nie Yan's expression. However, when he looked again, Nie Yan

was happily chatting with everyone like normal.

Did my mind just play a trick on me?

Liu Rui expelled these thoughts. He didn't think Nie Yan looked all that tough.

While Nie Yan was chatting, he would occasionally glance at Xie Yao. Her bright cheeks were supple yet firm. Her T-shirt was a bit of a tight-fit, and curved around her graceful figure, giving off a feeling that would make a person's heart palpitate.

In the previous timeline, Nie Yan only dared to sneak glances at her. In this life, his attitude had completely changed. He was able to calmly appreciate her beauty.

Xie Yao felt her heart race as she sensed Nie Yan's gaze. Feeling her cheeks turn slightly hot, she switched the topic with the female classmates around her. Nie Yan's gaze made her feel somewhat embarrassed, but she felt he was still much more pleasing to the eye than Liu Rui.

"No need. I'm not that great at kickboxing. I'll only end up embarrassing myself in front of everyone." Nie Yan pretended to decline.

This made Liu Rui believe even more that Nie Yan was just another weakling. This was a good opportunity. He would definitely humiliate him!



“No problem. It’s just a spar, swapping a few points. If there’s anything you don’t understand, I can teach you. I was recently appointed the teacher’s assistant of this class by Teacher Yang. Teacher Yang is our teacher this year,” Liu Rui said, sounding quite pleased with himself.

“Just a few days ago, Liu Rui passed the test for the Top Military Academy.” A short male student with a slightly wretched appearance inserted himself into the conversation.

Nie Yan knew this student. He was Liu Rui’s lackey, Han Jun. This person was also one of the people he loathed.

“Wow! How come I’ve never heard Liu Rui talk about this before?” a female classmate exclaimed in surprise.

Liu Rui felt a bit smug. He lightly laughed and said, “That was only an ordinary test, not the official one.”

“Still, that’s pretty amazing!”

“Yeah! This is the test of Top Military Academy we’re talking about!”

“That means I definitely can’t compete with you. I only know a few of the most basic kickboxing techniques,” Nie Yan said. He had accurately grasped Liu Rui’s nature. When this bastard had his eyes set on a target, and discovered they were easy to bully, he

absolutely wouldn't let them off easily. He was waiting for Liu Rui to take the bait!

“No problem. Let's go find a place,” Liu Rui replied, feigning a magnanimous tone.

## Chapter 245 – Cunning

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With Liu Rui being so insistent, Nie Yan could only agree with false reluctance.

Liu Rui's eyes glinted insidiously. You little bastard, I'll show you! Let's see if you can be so smug in the future!

Most of the class left the main building, heading for a nearby gymnasium, where there would be a ring for the two to face off.

More than twenty people tagged along just to watch the show. This match became quite the spectacle.

“Nie Yan, don't force yourself!” Xie Yao fretted anxiously. With her understanding of Liu Rui, she knew he wouldn't hold back in the slightest..

Nie Yan's heart melted as he saw Xie Yao's concerned eyes. Her kindness was exactly what he loved most about her. Even though most of his classmates looked down on him in the previous timeline, she never did. Xie Yao had even tutored him, offering guidance and encouragement for his studies. The memory of this kindness stayed with him for the rest of that life, and this one! Xie Yao occupied the most sacred place in his heart. If anyone dared to hurt her, he would pit his life against them in a heartbeat! Back then, perhaps his biggest regret was distancing himself from her to avoid sullyng her reputation.

Every time Nie Yan was forced into a corner, her image would

drift through his mind. The memory of her gentle face always brought him a feeling of refreshing warmth. This memory alone carried him through the darkest days of his past life.

“It’s just a quick exchange of pointers,” Nie Yan laughed. He patted his chest and reassured her, “After all my training, if nothing else I at least know how to take a beating.”

Xie Yao forced a chuckle after hearing Nie Yan’s hearty laughter. Although these words weren’t reassuring, her expression loosened somewhat. If it looked like the things would get out of hand, she could just call the match and prevent any serious injuries.

“Don’t worry, little brother! If you’re taking too bad of a beating, I’ll just help you down. I won’t let him hurt you seriously,” a two meter tall, burly student joked.

The towering student admitted awkwardly, “I never liked that kid, but I know I’m not his match.”

How could Nie Yan not recognize this person? Zhai Hao was like a brother to Nie Yan in the previous timeline.

“Thank you, brother. I promise I’ll hold my own against him,” Nie Yan replied. He felt touched by Zhai Hao’s words.

“You seem pretty confident,” Zhai Hao laughed. “However, I must warn you. Liu Rui’s legs are really strong. His record is 130 kg for squats and his leg strength surpasses 300 kg.”

A 130 kg squat and 300 kg leg strength was pretty good for a senior year high school student. But when compared to a monster like Nie Yan, it was nothing.

Nie Yan hadn't tested out his leg strength or squat weight in a long time. His most recent record squat was 367 kg, while his leg strength was over 700 kg. Liu Rui was nowhere close to Nie Yan. It was like a professional mixed martial artist fighting with a kid who only knew how to bully those weaker than him. Nie Yan could easily make short work of him! This was total domination! Ironically, Liu Rui was still standing there all pleased with himself, thinking that he would stomp on his opponent.

"We'll see when I go up there and try myself," Nie Yan replied. Since he decided to play the pig to eat the tiger, he would go through with it all the way!

From Zhai Hao's perspective, Nie Yan would definitely lose miserably. He already prepared himself to break things up if Liu Rui went too far.

Nie Yan and Liu Rui stood at the center of the open space, facing each other. The others stood off to the side and watched.

"Who do you guys think will win?"

"Liu Rui, obviously. Is there really a need to ask?"

No one was optimistic about Nie Yan's odds.

“Let's go all out; otherwise, we won't be able to enjoy ourselves. Even in a spar there are often injuries. But since we're all young, we should be able to quickly recover after some rest at home,” Nie Yan said in a seemingly docile manner, almost as if he were a lamb waiting for slaughter.

“Right! Our medical treatments are so advanced these days, there's no injury we can't heal! I won't hold back either. Let's have a good fight.” Liu Rui narrowed his eyes. He didn't expect for Nie Yan to willingly deliver himself to his doorstep. Since Nie Yan proposed it, he wouldn't pull any punches. Even if Nie Yan was seriously injured, he could only blame himself.

The classmates looked on in surprise. None of them expected Nie Yan to cut off all paths of retreat.

“Did this guy go crazy?”

“Who knows. What an idiot. Isn't he just asking to get his ass kicked?”

Liu Rui's eyes flashed with a cold light. Since you want to throw your life away, don't blame me for being impolite!

“No, that's not alright!” Xie Yao anxiously called out. If Liu Rui acted ruthlessly, with his leg strength, Nie Yan would definitely be seriously injured!

Without waiting for the bystanders to calm down, Liu Rui performed the opening formalities and took a basic stance.

Nie Yan also bowed formally. This was mandatory in any duel. It signified respect for the opponent, though he felt no such thing.

“Let’s start!” Liu Rui suddenly took off, rushing towards Nie Yan. The audience broke into a cold sweat as they saw Liu Rui dashing at his foe.

Liu Rui opened by lifting his leg to kick Nie Yan in the chest. Nie Yan raised his arms to block at first, but decided to nimbly sidestep instead after seeing Liu Rui’s direct assault.

Nie Yan’s sharp eyes stared at Liu Rui. From his perspective, the opponent was full of openings. He could think of over a dozen different ways to knock Liu Rui down flat on his ass with a single strike!

Liu Rui never expected Nie Yan’s movements to be so agile. He seemed to be even faster than Teacher Yang by a good bit. The truth dawned on him. This bastard had been playing him for a fool all along! However, just as he moved to defend, it was already too late.

In Nie Yan’s eyes, Liu Rui might as well not be defending at all!

With a twist of his body, Nie Yan slammed his elbow into Liu

Rui's back. His lightning-fast blow produced an audible thud as it landed. Liu Rui staggered forward from the hit, feeling the blood in his body surge. His bones felt like they were about to break apart, and he could tell he suffered serious internal injuries.

What a heavy strike!

Before he could catch his breath, he felt wind blowing into his ear. When he tried to react, it was already far too late.

Nie Yan executed a gorgeous spinning kick. His foot whipped across Liu Rui's face with immense force. As a loud crack rang out across the gymnasium, scaring the wits out of the spectators, Liu Rui was sent flying out several meters into the air before falling hard on the ground. He spat out a mouthful of blood, then went limp after uttering a pained groan.

The fight was over just like that!

The entire crowd became slack jawed.

No one ever thought the duel would end so quickly. Even more surprisingly, Liu Rui had lost! It was a complete rout, causing everyone to think that this new student was too fierce!

Everyone looked at Nie Yan appreciatively. The kick that sent Liu Rui flying clearly had hundreds of kg of power behind it!

No one knew in what state Liu Rui was in after taking such a kick



to the head. Just thinking about it made people wince in sympathy. They could feel their hair standing on end.

That kick was absolutely ruthless. It may have even been stronger than one from a professional athlete, and Nie Yan was still just a high school student!

Nie Yan released all of the anger and frustration built up from his previous life in the kick. Upon releasing the kick, he realized he used so much strength that Liu Rui would have to be confined to bed for quite a while, and immediately felt a burst of pleasure deep inside. Liu Rui's reputation of excellence and indomitability was destroyed as his sorry figure lay sprawled on the floor for everyone to see, including Xie Yao.

Nie Yan secretly hid his delight as he turned to his classmates and innocently asked, "Can someone call the school nurse? I didn't mean to do that, I had no idea he couldn't even take a single hit."

Someone hurriedly called over the school nurse, and Liu Rui was carried away on a stretcher. Before the start of the spar, both sides had bowed to each other to express they understood the consequences. As long as neither side died, the participants could get away with almost anything. With how far medicinal technology had advanced, practically anyone could be saved as long as they had a breath of life left in them.

"Damn, bro! That was fierce! You really baited that bastard good," Zhai Hao whispered from off to the side with a smirk that revealed a hint of schadenfreude.

“Bait him? Did I? I was just being casual. I didn’t expect him to be so weak,” Nie Yan denied, feigning ignorance.

“Didn’t I just tell you Liu Rui’s squat and leg strengths? You didn’t even react, but your kick just then was at least over 500 kg! You can play the pig to eat the tiger, but don’t treat me as a fool!” Zhai Hao chastised disdainfully.

“Haha... I guess I’ve been exposed. Lower your voice a bit. Help me keep this a secret.” Nie Yan laughed in embarrassment.

“You know, that kick of yours was pretty amazing. I fully approve! Don’t worry, I’ll keep your secret,” Zhai Hao laughed ruefully. As long as Nie Yan was aware that he knew about this matter, it was fine.

The reason Nie Yan had gotten close to Zhai Hao in the first place in the previous timeline was because of their mutual disgust for Liu Rui. Later, he even introduced Nie Yan to a circle of friends who all disliked Liu Rui.

“You’re so strong, do you happen to have a moment to teach us some of your techniques?” Zhai Hao asked. He was extremely obsessed with martial arts.

“Sure! I’ll definitely give you some pointers,” Nie Yan promised seriously. He wished to keep the brotherhood he shared with Zhai Hao during his past life and continue it on in this one.

“I’ll hold you to that!”

It was then that Xie Yao walked over, her face shrouded with complicated emotions.

“From the very start, you knew Liu Rui would be no match for you! Am I right?” Xie Yao demanded, her words tinted with traces of anger. To think that she had been so worried for Nie Yan. As it turned out, Liu Rui had been the one to be sent flying through the air!

Shaking his head, Nie Yan replied with a deadpan tone, “Nope! No such thing! How should I know who was stronger without first fighting?”

It was Nie Yan’s straight-faced “No such thing!” that pushed Xie Yao over the edge and brought a faint smile to her face. It was mildly infuriating, and yet rather amusing. But then again, Liu Rui was pretty annoying.

“You’re quite sly!” Xie Yao exclaimed as she narrowed her eyes at Nie Yan, who only chuckled in response.

She didn’t seem to be angry that he lied to her, so that, for him, was more than enough. In the end, it was worth it just to be able to kick Liu Rui—and very satisfying.

“So... my good brother, what’s your relationship with our class

goddess?” Zhai Hao asked nosily. His sharp senses told him that the banter between Nie Yan and Xie Yao went far beyond the norm. There was definitely something more to this relationship. Could they even be... secret lovers?!

“She’s just a friend,” Nie Yan chuckled. However, he added something else in his mind: my future girlfriend, that is.

Every time she talked with Nie Yan, it felt as if they had known each other for years. Such perfect familiarity and understanding shocked even herself. The possibility that Nie Yan was him crept closer and closer. They seemed to share a similar cunning, wretched personality, almost as if they had been cast from the same mold. The only thing was... she had no way of verifying whether or not they were the same person, so a layer of doubt could only remain in her heart.

## Chapter 246 – New Student

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“It’s almost time for class. Let’s head back.”

Nie Yan and the rest of his classmates returned to the classroom.

“Hey, do you play Conviction?” Zhai Hao asked. Almost everybody was talking about this game right now. For many, it was an essential part of their lives.

Xie Yao couldn’t help but perk up her ears as she turned her attention to Nie Yan. She felt he resembled a certain someone she knew inside the game to an uncanny degree. Their names were pronounced the same. They spoke and acted in a similar manner. She also felt that same sense of deep familiarity.

However, Xie Yao reminded herself that some people took on completely different personas in game. For example, she was fairly reserved in reality. But when she entered Conviction, she became livelier and her temperament was also more cheerful. Inside the game, she could release all the stress bottled up inside her after a long day.

Then again, some people behaved the same both in game and reality.

“Of course I play,” Nie Yan replied. The students talked the most about their level and equipment inside the game. High level and good gear equated to face. If they found an amazing piece of equipment, the first thing they would do was show it off to their

peers. Although this sort of pissing contest was somewhat childish, it was something that was always brought up.

“What level are you?” Zhai Hao immediately grew excited when he found out Nie Yan played the game.

“Level 23,” Nie Yan replied. After dying, that was his level now.

Xie Yao revealed a disappointed expression. So it's not him...? The person she was thinking of had reached Level 35 long ago, and was most likely at an even more astonishingly high level right now. But Nie Yan was only Level 23. After thinking it over again, she was reminded of that person's low-key nature. It was entirely possible that Nie Yan was lying about his true level. As such, she quickly recovered from her disappointment.

However, conflicting emotions arose in Xie Yao's heart. She hoped Nie Yan was that person since they truly were alike. These underlying feelings affected her mood. At the same time, she also hoped Nie Yan wasn't that person because she wouldn't know how to face him.

If Nie Yan and that player she was thinking of were truly one and the same, would she eventually get together with him? Her heart palpitated at the possibility.

She admired the leader of her guild, the heaven-defying Nirvana Flame. But the distance between them was as wide as the vast sky. If that person entered her life, how should she react?

“I’m Level 26. I formed a party with five other friends. I’ll bring you levelling with us the next time you get on,” Zhai Hao said, sounding pleased with himself. His current level could be considered relatively high among the player base. Of the numerous students in the school, there were only a few that surpassed him in level. As a young male, he still had that little bit of vanity. Even though he was a sincere and honest individual, that didn’t mean he was completely immune to such things.

“Sure, just call me up whenever,” Nie Yan agreed in a straightforward manner. Among the people he was acquainted with in the previous timeline, Zhai Hao was a good friend so he saw no reason not to meet up with him inside the game.

“Miss Class Flower, do you play Conviction? Care to tag along?” Zhai Hao asked in a slightly eager tone. If Xie Yao joined up, then those hot-blooded wolf pups in the party would definitely go wild with joy.

Xie Yao pursed her lips into a smile before shaking her head. “No, I’ll have to pass. You should ask Xia Ling and them if they’re interested.”

Very few people in the class knew Xie Yao played Conviction, let alone her level or how good she was as a player. Even her female classmates who were very skilled had never once met her in the game.

“That’s fine too. Do you really think Xia Ling and them will agree to come?” Zhai Hao asked, looking over at a lithe figure on the other side of the room. His expression grew somewhat shy.

When Nie Yan saw how Zhai Hao was acting, he couldn't help but slightly smile. Zhai Hao and Xia Ling were a couple in the previous timeline. They always kept in touch with each other in university. Later on, their jobs had them moving to two different cities. After enduring a long-distance relationship for eight years, they were finally reunited. Their story was a shining testament to the ideal of love finding a way through any obstacle.

"They'll definitely agree. But you guys will have to take care of them. Their levels aren't nearly as high as yours. I can help invite them on your behalf," Xie Yao replied. She also knew Zhai Hao had a crush on Xia Ling.

"Then you have my thanks, Miss Class Flower!" Zhai Hao was slightly unable to contain his excitement. He turned to Nie Yan and asked, "When are you free? Is tomorrow fine? We can meet up when the servers reopen."

Nie Yan pondered for a moment. Although he desired to foster his friendship with Zhai Hao and the others, he was going to be very busy tomorrow.

"I'm good with tomorrow, but I can only hang out with you guys for around two hours before I have to leave. I already made plans with some other friends," Nie Yan replied. He felt no harm in sparing some time to mingle with old friends. They were always together during his past life, especially when they were forced to retreat deep into the mountain forest after attracting the ire of Victorious Return. Recalling all the trials and tribulations they went through, he couldn't help but grow nostalgic. Just because he



struck out in this life didn't mean he could simply forget these good friends. He decided to meet up with them, then attempt to pull them into Asskickers United.

“You're that busy?” Zhai Hao asked in surprise. Their excuse for asking Xia Ling and the other girls to join them was so that they could get to know the new transfer student better. Nie Yan's performance today was truly impressive, so everyone was curious about him. If he left, what reason would Xia Ling and the other girls have to stay behind?

“Huh, we're just meeting up. You guys can still continue levelling together after I leave, right? I'll join up with you guys some other day,” Nie Yan replied. This was a rare opportunity for Zhai Hao and Xia Ling to get together. He didn't want to be a nuisance.

Zhai Hao thought for a moment. “I suppose that's okay too. Since you're so busy, let's just get in touch with each other in the game first. We'll schedule plans for some other day. How do we meet?”

“What's your [IGN](#)?” Even though he already knew what Zhai Hao's character name was, he chose to ask anyway. If he revealed his own, it would definitely send out shockwaves throughout the school, let alone their class. The Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame was renowned across the entire Viridian Empire.

“It's Mad Warframe. I play a Berserker,” Zhai Hao replied.

“Alright, I'll find you tomorrow,” Nie Yan said. He didn't wish to speak about his circumstances inside the game. Zhai Hao and the

others would find out anyway when they met up with him tomorrow, and he could swear them to secrecy about not revealing his identity.

“You still haven’t told me yours,” Zhai Hao said. With Nie Yan acting so secretive, he was a little curious.

Nie Yan smiled and shook his head. “Don’t worry, you’ll know.”

“Okay,” Zhai Hao said helplessly. Was there really a need for this guy to act so mysteriously!?

If Zhai Hao knew who Nie Yan was inside the game, he definitely wouldn’t be thinking this.

Xie Yao looked at Nie Yan, her clear eyes blinking inquisitively. The suspicions in her heart grew even stronger. Why was he unwilling to divulge his name inside the game?

“I’ll go invite Xia Ling and the others,” Xie Yao said. She was feeling a little smug. Hmph! Even if you aren’t willing to say it, the truth will be revealed tonight anyway. Xia Ling is my best friend. She won’t hide anything from me!

Very soon, Zhai Hao received word from Xie Yao; Xia Ling agreed to join them. Tagging along with her would be two other female classmates. All of them were around Level 21, not high but not low either.

The school bell rang, signifying the start of class. Everyone sat in their assigned seats.

Nie Yan pretended to look for his seat before stopping at the desk beside Xie Yao. He turned to her and smiled. “What luck! My assigned seat is right next to yours.”

Xie Yao glanced at the name displayed on the neighbouring computer. It really was assigned to Nie Yan. This spot was previously occupied by a female classmate, but she later transferred schools and it became empty. Who would’ve expected it would be given to him.

Xie Yao pursed her lips. Was there really such a coincidence? There were over a dozen empty seats in the class, so why was Nie Yan placed right next to her?

Nie Yan sat down, resting his elbow on the desk with his hand supporting his head; he gazed at Xie Yao. Pretty deskmate, looks like we’re neighbours again.

Xie Yao was only a short distance away. He wouldn’t let himself be separated from her ever again.

Nie Yan felt truly blessed. Even though he suffered greatly in his past life, he was receiving ample compensation in this life. There was a suitable saying. The heavens allowed people to suffer so that they learned to truly cherish happiness.

The teacher in charge of this class, Yang Boyi, walked into the room and swept his gaze over the students before stopping on Nie Yan.

Nie Yan didn't avert his eyes. He recalled Yang Boli was a strict but fair teacher.

“We have a new student joining us today. I assume all of you already know his name by now. As for Liu Rui, I've received word back from the school infirmary, he'll need to spend some time on his recovery. Since this was a spar, not a fight, I won't say any more on the matter. According to the laws set by the government, Nie Yan won't be held responsible for this incident. Furthermore, since Liu Rui won't be able to attend school for a while because of the injuries he sustained, he won't be able to fulfil his obligations, so the position of teacher's assistant will be tentatively transferred over to Nie Yan. When Liu Rui returns, the class can decide who they want the position to go to by vote.”

Yang Boyi's announcement gave rise to a great deal of whispered discussion. Liu Rui really kicked a steel plate this time. Even his position as teacher's assistant was snatched away. However, most of the class felt the sweet tang of schadenfreude. After all, Liu Rui's personality rubbed many of his classmates the wrong way.

Teacher's assistant... Nie Yan couldn't help but secretly rejoice. In the future, he could take advantage of this to spend more time with Xie Yao. The teacher's assistant had the authority to make students with less than stellar grades stay behind for tutoring. Although Xie Yao was by no means a bad student, in fact she was the complete opposite, finding an excuse was a very simple

matter. The water on the roof was the first to receive the moonlight.<sup>1</sup>

Yang Boyi glanced at Nie Yan and said, "Our class has many promising students who have a good chance at entering the Top Military Academy. I hope that you all work hard, and don't fall behind in your studies. If you want to get in, you'll also have to pass the academic portion of their recruitment examination. Before you is a sample of one of their entrance tests."

Everyone let out groans as several pages' worth of test problems appeared on their screens. There were a total of 1,200 points divided into mathematics, machine theory, physics, and so on. Nothing was left out. These subjects were all very difficult, but almost all of them had practical applications in the real world.

Nie Yan couldn't help but sigh. This was his life as a senior-year in high school! When he turned to look at Xie Yao, she was already focused on the test problems, scrolling down the screen with her fingers. Sensing his gaze, her long eyelashes faintly trembled and she couldn't help but become somewhat restless and flustered.

"Focus on your test!" Xie Yao lightly stomped her foot. She didn't know why Nie Yan affected her mood so easily. It was probably due to that sense of familiarity she got from him. Her tone was much less formal, almost as if she were scolding a lover.

Nie Yan didn't dare to act presumptuously after hearing the words of his pretty deskmate. He focused his attention back onto the computer screen. Various scenes from the previous timeline flashed through his mind, filling his body with a faint feeling of

warmth as though he was soaking in a relaxing hot spring.

## Chapter 247 – Planning

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Nie Yan answered question after question without breaking a sweat. By the time they were 30 minutes into the exam, he was roughly half-finished. He glimpsed around him and noticed the majority of others had burrowed their heads into their papers in frantic thought. Looking back at his own screen, he guessed he would score just over 700 marks, which should be enough for what he wanted. If he would score significantly higher, he would be thought of as a monster. So, he put in glaring mistakes in the latter half of the exam.

Two hours flew by, marking the end of the examination. The grades were publicly listed on the main screen in front: Xie Yao took first place with a grand total of 763 points, with Nie Yan taking a close second at 731 points. Third seemed to be roughly 590 points, while the greater part of the remaining grades were occupied by the 300s and 400s, quite unbearable to look at compared to the top scorers.

Truth be told, even those marks were nothing to look down on. In fact, incorrect answers did not represent inability; rather, the system evaluated the incorrect solutions and nonetheless gave partial marks. It judged fairly, since each person did have their own strong and weak subjects.

Zhai Hao looked at the list of grades, then looked at Nie Yan sitting a bit farther away. “Damn, what a monster!” he exclaimed, unable to keep the gloom away from his tone. Nie Yan was already so skilled in martial arts, and now his studies were on another level as well! He would likely have no problems being recruited by the Top Military Academy.

Xie Yao glanced at Nie Yan with slightly widened eyes. I didn't think his academics were this good as well!

Behind the podium, Yang Boyi smiled, pleased with Nie Yan's results. In his office a bit earlier, he was quite amazed to hear that the new student had defeated Liu Rui. He was also informed that Nie Yan had transferred over from Ningjiang, supposedly squeezed in for a small fee. Quite frankly, he expected Nie Yan to be lacking in all departments, but to his surprise, it was the complete opposite. Without a doubt, it would be worth it to foster his talents. So long as his academics were sufficient, he would have no difficulty entering the Top Military Academy. And now, he was amazed once again. His academics were beyond sufficient—they even matched Xie Yao's, the top student in the class! He estimated that Liu Rui, on a good day, could probably graze the 600 marks, and even that was pushing it.

"I didn't expect for your academics to be this good!" Xie Yao exclaimed as she looked at her new desk-mate.

"It was decent." Nie Yan kept about a modest tone. He felt a tinge of guilt, knowing very well that he scored so highly not because of hard work, but rather his rebirth.

In the eyes of his classmates, Nie Yan did indeed appear humble and collected—an entire world of difference from Liu Rui, who would have been itching to let everyone know the tiniest of accomplishments.



Xie Yao recalled Nirvana Flame, who was similarly collected no matter what he came across. Only when his guild was provoked would he become firm and haughty. As she further recalled such memories, the thread differentiating the two in her mind became all the more thin.

Xie Yao's thoughts were thrown into shambles. Are they the same person?

Yang Boyi held Nie Yan in an increasingly high regard. From what he had seen of Nie Yan, he was much calmer than Liu Rui, whose arrogant attitude was undesirable.

I really lucked out this time, Yang Boyi thought. The end of the year bonus is pretty much mine already! It was truly a brilliant decision to accept Nie Yan back then.

“All right, we'll end it here today. You're free to go. Tomorrow we'll begin full lessons. First class will be kickboxing, so don't forget to prepare!” Yang Boyi said, as he explained a good deal of their class work.

He pulled Nie Yan to the side for a quick word; it was no doubt the usual speech about hoping he would become a part of the class soon.

The teacher was a pretty good one. In the student reunions of Nie Yan's past life, many would mention him with a great deal of respect.

There were no signs of Xie Yao in the classroom by the time Nie Yan returned. He ran to the school entrance, and caught up to her there. She was chatting with a group of other female students, but Nie Yan cared not for any of that. He threw himself immediately into the group and started up a conversation with them as well.

“Xie Yao, do you want me to walk you home?” Nie Yan asked.

“Hey Nie Yan, you seem pretty eager to please her, huh? Are you into Xie Yao? You better step up your game then! There’s probably not a boy, maybe not even a girl in our school alone who isn’t interested in her. At this pace, you’ll never win her heart!” Xia Ling teased.

A few other female students also started poking fun at Nie Yan.

“Your outer appearance isn’t attractive enough. Look at your clothes! Even if you don’t own a Solun, at the very least you should have a Karlina. Otherwise, you’d be hardly presentable to ask our goddess out!”

“Sure, you have good marks, but for a man it’s most important to be kind and gentle!”

The female students let out a slew of criticizing remarks, but they were of course just joking. Even they had to admit that Nie Yan had many attracting features such as his calm demeanor, and more notably, his strength—Liu Rui’s flight through the air continued to be an image deeply imprinted in their memories.

These female classmates held nothing back, and Nie Yan laughed along with them. He was unperturbed. He didn't care if the fact he was pursuing Xie Yao was out in the open.

"I've got to go now!" Xie Yao quickly said, breaking up the embarrassment as she escaped the scene in a hurry. "My family's here to pick me up."

Xie Yao bid farewell to her fellow classmates. She met Nie Yan's eyes, but quickly shifted them away and jumped into the car.

The vehicle drove off.

All traces of her seemed to vanish, leaving nothing apart from a slight emptiness in Nie Yan's heart.

"With Xie Yao gone, I bet you're feeling pretty lonely. If you asked to date me right now, I might even consider it!" A moderately beautiful female classmate teased Nie Yan on the side.

"Hey, aren't you being a bit disloyal? Xie Yao just left, yet you're already eyeing what belongs to her." Xia Ling giggled, gently pushing her classmate aside.

"This is called the early bird getting the worm! If I don't act now, I won't stand a chance later!" the female classmate retorted.

These classmates of his were simply too intrepid! Nie Yan wanted to find an excuse to go his own way as soon as possible! He looked

far off in the distance and said, “My chauffeur is here to pick me up, so I’ll be taking my leave as well.”

His classmates saw a car pull up, after which Nie Yan jumped in. Seeing the car drive off, several female classmates exclaimed in admiration.

“From the way he dressed, I didn’t expect him to be rich too. He actually has his own personal driver. That car was a Model 7 series Vanguard. Even the cheapest package goes for a minimum of ¥3,000,000.”

“A rich person wearing such cheap clothes, now that’s what you call being low-key...”

The female classmates discussed in high spirits. Nie Yan’s exceptional talent in martial arts and academics paired with his decent family background made him the perfect catch in their eyes. In an instant, his popularity surpassed that of Liu Rui.

Nie Yan wiped the sweat from his forehead after getting into the car. Those high school girls were fearless. Nevertheless, the first day of school was very fruitful. He got to take revenge on Liu Rui, leaving him unable to return to school for the next few days, and he managed to leave behind a good impression on Xie Yao.

Nie Yan checked the clock. It was still early. He decided to go get lunch first, then make a visit to his parent’s company which was on the right track and expanding at an astonishing pace. Everything was unfolding the same as it did during the previous

timeline. His father used the funds amassed from reselling the smuggled metal to buy a large building. After hiring some talented employees, the company quickly began operations.

Although this sort of business was risky, the profits were sky-high. By investing some funds to purchase raw ores from abroad, then transporting them into the factory for refinement, the company could earn a 900% return by selling them to military enterprises. With the connections Nie Yan's father developed at the border, a round trip would take no longer than two to three days. This moneymaking speed was even faster than a banknote printing machine!

Furthermore, there was no need to worry about competition since Nie Yan's father held an exclusive trade contract.

In the previous timeline, the company quickly developed to the greatest heights in its field. Like many other companies with a surplus of money, it eventually expanded into other areas. The first thing to come to mind was the number one trending virtual reality game, Conviction. With Nie Yan's cousin, Ah Chen, in charge, a report was submitted to his father's desk.

Nie Yan was unable to dissuade his father. All he could do was pay attention to how the company fared in Conviction. In the future, his father would invest an enormous amount of funds to get the War God Tribe going. It was already in the initial phases of discussion.

Since the competition in Calore was too fierce, the starting point of the War God Tribe would be the second largest city in the

Viridian Empire, Nisode City. For the time being, it wouldn't have any contact with Asskickers United. The guild's name was still War God Tribe. Nie Yan didn't know how the guild would develop in this life. But with the strong backing of his father's company, it definitely wouldn't be too bad.

When the time was appropriate, Nie Yan planned to hand over everything he had built inside the game to his parents. In the future, Asskickers United and the War God Tribe would join together to defeat Cao Xu's forces!

Another thing that made Nie Yan feel more at ease was that at his urging, Luo Ming's group would have no part in the company. Even after they came over and cried and begged several times, his father remained firm on his refusal. Just why were his parents currently working hard to earn money? His mother and father persevered for the sake of giving him a brighter future, especially now that he had matured. They felt extremely gratified.

No matter how flawed Luo Ming and the others were, his parents would've still forgiven them because they were blood related. However, when they began hounding Nie Yan, they crossed the bottom line. Nie Yan was their nephew by blood, but the way they treated him was no better than a sewer rat!

So no matter how much Luo Ming and the others begged, Nie Yan's parents didn't let them anywhere near the company.

Nie Yan let out a sigh of relief. These hidden dangers were removed. External dangers were nothing to be afraid of. What was truly terrifying was dangers from within! If Luo Ming and the

others were allowed to enter the company, it was the same as letting the fox into the henhouse!

After visiting his parent's company, Nie Yan's mood improved greatly as he was freed of many of his worries. Furthermore, he had received an update. The auction house at the heart of Calore and the Mercenary Auction House were sold to Nie Yan for 1,700 gold and 1,600 gold respectively. It was much cheaper than the previous timeline, but he still expended quite a bit of funds. Due to his fierce increase in the bid, it was likely he scared off all his competitors. From their perspective, there were other virtual properties that had potential to rise greatly in value, and were no worse than the auction house at the center of Calore or the Mercenary Auction House.

Of course, Nie Yan experienced the growth of this game once already, and he knew they were completely wrong. The auction house at the center of Calore and the Mercenary Auction House were absolutely the most profitable virtual properties!

Nie Yan checked his balance. He still had 2,600 gold remaining. It was enough to bid for another property! However, he would check over all his options first and decide which was most worth it.

By the time Nie Yan returned home and ate dinner, it was almost time to get back online. He wondered what sort of changes he would see after the new expansion was implemented.

# Chapter 248 – Shocked

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Logging back into Conviction, Nie Yan checked the changelog for the Buried History expansion. Just like in the previous timeline, the experience required to level up had been significantly reduced. If the top players were over Level 100 when this expansion was implemented, those at the bottom of the ladder could slowly close the gap but would never be able to truly catch up. However, the game was still in its early stages and everyone's levels were still low. With the lowered experience requirements, the level leaderboards were sure to see drastic reshuffling.

In addition to easier levelling, a change in the game mechanics was implemented. Previously, the player's damage was limited with most hits being registered as misses by the system when fighting enemies over six levels above them. This was the level suppression effect. But with the new expansion, this same effect would now only occur if there was more than a ten-level difference between the combatants.

The main classes also saw adjustments to their skills. The most notable change was a buff to the Warrior's Guard Stance skill. With a big boost to its defensive capabilities, players could now tank higher levelled bosses. At the same time, a portion of the named Lord-class bosses received buffs to compensate for the power creep.

Furthermore, quite a few dungeons received a bit of balancing with their Expert and Specialist difficulties retuned to be more challenging. The drop rates for certain equipment sets were also lowered, while the properties of some equipment received buffs by varying degrees.



Nie Yan headed to the Asskickers United headquarters to rearrange their short-term strategies. The most pressing matter at hand was to assemble a batch of players somewhere ideal for a mass levelling session. Later in the afternoon, they would be helping Sleepy Fox seize the small stronghold. As he ruminated over this matter, he realized Asskickers United was at the point where they would have to start capturing strongholds as well!

The difficulty of capturing strongholds in the wilderness was extremely high, so the first thing Nie Yan wanted to do was bolster the strength of his guild members.

After finishing all his preparations related to guild, Nie Yan contacted Zhai Hao by adding Mad Warframe to his friends list.

“Say, Zhai Hao, do you think Nie Yan stood us up? How come he still hasn’t shown up?” asked a female classmate.

“No, I don’t think he’s that kind of person. He seems like someone who keeps his promises,” Zhai Hao said, though he wasn’t too sure himself. They had been waiting for quite a while now, and still no word from Nie Yan. Worst of all, there was no way of making contact because he didn’t know Nie Yan’s character name!

“Why else would he keep his IGN secret?”

The nine of them were already gathered, including Xia Ling, so Zhai Hao began to feel somewhat irritated. Did Nie Yan really bail

on them?

“How about we just go off by ourselves if we still don’t hear from him in 5 minutes? We have 5 Mages, 2 Warriors, a Paladin, a Priest, and a Thief, so levelling should be pretty fast,” Xia Ling proposed, rescuing Zhai Hao from his predicament.

“I suppose that’s all we can do.” Zhai Hao nodded. He couldn’t help but feel grateful toward Xia Ling for being considerate.

Just as everyone agreed to this, Zhai Hao received a new notification. He was given a big shock when he glanced at it.

Nirvana Flame has sent you a friend request.

“Holy shit!” Zhai Hao cried out in alarm. Who wasn’t familiar with the name Nirvana Flame? Back in Kiln Fire Woods, this person had single-handedly wiped out over 20,000 players from Victorious Return. The guild leader of Asskickers United, a legendary existence in Conviction!

Just how many players steeled their will in an attempt to worm their way into the ranks of Asskickers United, all for the sake of a few words of advice from Nirvana Flame? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? He and his friends were among the many who applied for membership but were flat-out rejected. They could only join one of the branch guilds like Warriors United, becoming the most ordinary of members.

Who was Nirvana Flame? He was the boss of their boss! The Big Kahuna!

If any of them saw Nirvana Flame on the street, they could only gaze at him from afar while sighing in admiration. He was a deity in the eyes of the player base!

And such a godly figure sent him a friend request! How could he not be astonished?

Zhai Hao rubbed his eyes before looking again. No doubt, the friend request really did read Nirvana Flame! It was unmistakable! A mythical-like existence really sent him a friend request. He looked at the notification again and again, but it still felt like a dream.

“Nie Yan, Nie Yan (Nirvana Flame), Nie Yan...” Zhai Hao muttered repeatedly. His body trembled. Oh, fuck! It really is him!

“Hey, Zhai Hao, did you lose your head? Why do you keep repeating Nie Yan’s name?” asked a female classmate

“Do you guys know who Nie Yan is?” Zhao Hao asked, sounding clearly flustered.

“What do you mean? He’s the new transfer student in our class...” that female classmate replied in a puzzled tone.

Xia Ling also gave Zhai Hao an odd look. She was very

bewildered.

“You’ll find out in just a moment,” Zhai Hao said, trying to hold back his excitement, before checking the name on his friends list again for the umpteenth time.

「Where are you guys right now?」Nie Yan asked.

「We’re at Link Town,」Zhai Hao replied. They had just transferred there, and were about to set off to level.「Nie Yan, you’ve really kept us waiting...」

「I’m sorry. I had to take care of a few things first,」Nie Yan said apologetically but didn’t offer up any further explanation. He arrived at the Calore transfer area and teleported to Link Town.

Nie Yan checked the coordinates Zhai Hao provided him, then headed over to meet up with them.

“Nie Yan’s here!” Zhai Hao exclaimed. He felt somewhat nervous at the prospect of meeting one of his heroes. Who wouldn’t be excited?

“Where?”

As several others echoed these words, everyone noticed a familiar figure approaching them, as though they had seen him somewhere before. The group racked their brains trying to figure this out before someone finally remembered.

“Woah! It’s the ‘Mad Rogue’ Nirvana Flame!”

“Nie Yan?”

A feeling of immense shock overtook the group. Nie Yan’s fame was too much for them. As they watched Nie Yan walk over, they couldn’t help but shiver as the terrifying scene of him holding his dagger with a merciless grin on his lips in Kiln Fire Woods flashed past their eyes.

“Is Nie Yan really Nirvana Flame...?” someone asked in disbelief. Even though the reality was right in front of them, they still found this hard to believe.

Only Xia Ling remained relatively calm. She was best friends with Xie Yao, so they would often discuss some private matters. She had long since known there was a person Xie Yao deeply admired inside the game, and that was Nirvana Flame!

Xia Ling had once teased Xie Yao, joking that she was living in a fairy tale. Who was Nirvana Flame? He was a mythical figure that led Asskickers United into a new era, carving out a space for them in the history books of the game. He was an untouchable existence for millions of players. However, meeting such a person was only possible in the virtual world. It would be impossible to encounter someone like him in the real world, so any fantasies she had of getting together with him were doomed from the start.

When Xie Yao had called Xia Ling up in the afternoon to talk

about her suspicions of Nie Yan, she actually laughed at Xie Yao for her silly delusions. Although she knew Xie Yao had a favourable impression of Nie Yan, was there really a need to speculate he was Nirvana Flame?

But Xie Yao was extremely serious, imploring her to confirm whether or not her suspicions were true.

Even though Xia Ling had her doubts, she still took on the task entrusted to her by Xie Yao. Who would've known that this best friend of hers had hit the nail on the head. The corners of her mouth curved into a mischievous smile. Just how would Xie Yao react when she learned she was right all along?

Nie Yan eyed the nine people in front of him. Zhai Hao was there of course, as well as six others with whom he was acquainted with, especially Li Rui and Liu Xuchen. They were his diehard brothers in the past life. Although they were in different homerooms, they often hung out together. The entire group was composed of people with pretty good personalities. As the saying went, birds of a feather flocked together. A person could be judged based on the people close to them.

“Shit! I didn’t expect the new classmate Zhai Hao wanted to introduce us to was the guild leader of Asskickers United, Nirvana Flame. Am I really not dreaming? Li Rui, pinch me!” Li Xuchen cried out, finding it all way too incredible.

“I don’t think we’re dreaming...” Li Rui replied in a daze. Nirvana Flame, Heaven Breaker, and Sleepy Fox were famous names that only appeared in stories. They were often the topics of

everyone's discussions. He couldn't even imagine himself meeting one of these distinguished players, let alone chat with them.

Zhai Hao and his friends wanted to join Asskickers United. But they were rejected because they failed to meet the bar. In their eyes, every single member from that guild was an apex existence they could never hope of approaching, to say nothing of the one who led them all!

But now, this person was standing before them.

This was equivalent to someone who burnt incense to Buddha every day in hopes of a miracle suddenly blessed with a face-to-face meeting.

The unimaginable shock!

“Bro, I didn't expect you to be so famous!” Zhai Hao was about to lightly punch Nie Yan on the shoulder, but he suddenly recalled the large disparity in their status and withdrew his fist in embarrassment.

“I'm sorry. There were too many things I had to attend to in the guild, so I ended up being late. Let's go, I'll take you guys levelling with me! We're all classmates, there's no need to be so reserved,” Nie Yan said with a bright smile which was as pleasant as a spring breeze. He didn't want to alienate these good brothers from his past life because of the difference in their status.

Nie Yan's wide smile broke the ice and set the group at ease.

"I didn't expect the Mad Rogue to be Zhai Hao's classmate! This is incredible!"

"Yeah, it's unbelievable!"

Discovering that Nie Yan was pretty easy-going, Li Rui and the others circled around and began chatting with him animatedly.

"I'm sorry I couldn't tell you guys in advance. The fewer people who know my true identity, the better. I hope you guys can keep this a secret for me."

"For sure! We'll definitely keep this under wraps for you." A few of them even patted their chests in assurance. Suddenly, they felt even closer to this hero.

Nie Yan felt a sense of warmth in his heart as he looked at all these familiar faces. These people had accompanied him through the darkest times in his past life. Even those things happened in another reality, the friendship between them could be slowly rebuilt from the ground up.

The two female classmates also approached closer.

"I didn't think you were Nirvana Flame! This is too amazing!"



“Hey, do you have a girlfriend?” the more brazen of the two boldly asked.

“Not right now, but I’m hoping to get with Xie Yao,” Nie Yan answered directly.

“Wow! She’s our class goddess, you know? But I think you’re definitely her match!” If even Nie Yan wasn’t good enough, who was?

“Yeah, Xie Yao is the lucky one. I’m so jealous!” the other girl sighed. If there were someone like Nie Yan pursuing her, she would date him in a heartbeat.

Nie Yan smiled meaningfully at Xia Ling. He knew she was going to inform Xie Yao of his words.

Xia Ling evaluated Nie Yan from the viewpoint of Xie Yao’s best friend and judged his character to be pretty good. Even though he was an extraordinary individual, he was laid-back, humble, and possessed an otherworldly sort of self-confidence rarely seen in others. More importantly, however, Xie Yao already liked Nie Yan. Taking all of this into consideration, the two were practically a match made in heaven. She sent a whisper to Xie Yao.

## Chapter 249 – Bringing To Level

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Yao Yao was farming Hyenas in the depths of Violetdream Plains with Yu Lan and the rest of their team.

“Yao Yao, what’s wrong? You look worried,” Yu Lan asked, a concerned expression clearly visible on her face.

Yao Yao shook her head. “It’s nothing, I’m fine.” Her voice chat lit up as she replied. It was Xia Ling!

“Sorry, Big Sis. I have to take this call.” Yao Yao gave Yu Lan an apologetic look before answering the voice chat.

Seeing Yao Yao being so tight-lipped, Yu Lan’s curiosity was piqued. Just what was going on?

「Xia Ling, how did it go?」Yao Yao asked in a pressing tone. Her heart was filled with a mixture of anticipation and restlessness. This kind of complicated emotion was hard to describe.

Xia Ling initially wanted to tease Xie Yao a little before telling her the news. But after hearing the anxiety in her best friend’s voice, she discarded the thought.「You were right: he’s Nirvana Flame. He probably doesn’t know your in-game name though.」

Xie Yao felt like a huge weight was lifted off her chest, but her mind turned into even more of a chaotic mess as she struggled to resolve the conflict in her heart. She was at a loss for quite a while

after finding out Nie Yan was precisely that Nirvana Flame who she so deeply admired.

「Xia Ling, what do you think I should do?」

「Since he's right there for the taking, why don't you just snatch him up yourself? I think he's a good catch. He's talented, and his personality is much better than Liu Rui's. I'm telling you now, Nie Yan is being eyed by almost every girl in our class. If you're slow now, don't regret it after he gets taken by another girl,」Xia Ling teased.

Xie Yao's cheeks started to burn up. She still held some reservations. What if Nie Yan didn't like her back? As she got to this point in her train of thoughts, a faint ripple surfaced in her heart, though she didn't know what it signified.

「He said he wants to be your man,」Xia Ling said with a laugh, accurately guessing what was going through her best friend's mind right now.

「Really? Me?」

「Yes, you! Xie Yao! Are you willing? Do you want me to tell him that you're Yao Yao?」Xia Ling asked. She was in favour of seeing Nie Yan and Xie Yao becoming a couple.

Xie Yao considered for a moment before shaking her head.「No, it's better he doesn't know. Don't tell him for now.」

Xia Ling didn't attempt to force Xie Yao in any direction. She felt that too much outside interference would make things worse.

「I'll let you deal with this by yourself. Luckily for you, none of our classmates know you play Conviction; otherwise, your secret would've already been revealed,」Xia Ling said, sympathizing with her friend. On the one hand, Xie Yao could spend time with Nie Yan both in game and reality. On the other hand, Xie Yao would probably worry things would become awkward between them if he found out her identity.

「If I can, I'll keep it a secret for a while longer. Hopefully, I'll get to reveal it to him one day under the right circumstances,」Xie Yao said. She felt a little happy that Nie Yan wanted to woo her in real life. But when she recalled how distant he seemed in-game, she couldn't help but feel at a bit of a loss.

Xie Yao had discovered some time ago that Nie Yan was purposefully keeping his distance from her, which was a source of sadness for her.

Nie Yan had no idea that Yao Yao and Xie Yao were the same person. In his eyes, Yao Yao was an intoxicating poison. He would never forget that night they spent together in that secret chamber. The memory crossed his mind from time to time. Her pure-white body laid completely bare before him—bewitching, like a goddess who had fallen down to earth. He was worried he would fall to this temptation again. He had a favourable impression of her, to the extent you could say he liked her very much. After all, they had been friends for so long. However, his love for Xie Yao was carved

into his very being, so deeply that it would forever remain!

If Nie Yan was given a choice, he would always choose Xie Yao over Yao Yao, to say nothing of the fact that nothing had occurred between the two of them yet. As a result, he subconsciously distanced himself from Yao Yao, so as to maintain their friendship and avoid hurting her.

Xie Yao had no way of knowing all this.

「He probably won't be tempted by other girls in our class. With a beauty like our Xie Yao by his side, all other girls will pale in comparison,」Xia Ling comforted.

「Hah, you're still in the mood to tease me,」Xie Yao softly scolded, but it did lift her mood up.

「I'm only speaking the truth. Anyway, Nie Yan is bringing us somewhere to grind. We're setting out now. It'll only take two hours, so I'll contact you then,」Xia Ling said. She was looking forward to see where a legendary existence like Nie Yan would take them to level.

「Mhm, let's talk later.」Xie Yao hung up the call. She couldn't help but worry about what the future had in store.

In Link Town, Nie Yan put on a large black cloak which hid his appearance.

“Do any of you guys have AoE magic?” Nie Yan asked. If he was going to power-level them, he would require a player who could wipe out large groups of mobs.

“Nope.”

“No.” All five Mages shook their heads.

As ordinary players, they had already done well for themselves by obtaining a few pieces of Silver-grade equipment, apart from their mostly Bronze-grade gear. At best, they had a few high-damage single target spells between them. The current market price for an area of effect skill book was at least 50 silver. So how could they afford it?

Nie Yan thought for a moment. “Hold on, I’ll call someone over.”

「Tang Yao, come help me power-level a few classmates.」

「Sure, tell me the coordinates. I’ll be there in a jiffy.」Tang Yao was just about to go off to level with some guild members. But when he received Nie Yan’s call, he immediately backed out and hurried over.

Just as Zhai Hao, Li Rui, and the others were chatting in high spirits about how they were looking forward to levelling with Nie Yan, a player with a chubby blue fairy floating behind him walked toward them. His slightly rotund appearance was greatly overshadowed by the amazing equipment on his body.

The group was shocked after recognizing his identity.

They had just been wondering who Nie Yan called over to level with them. None of them expected they would meet another amazing figure, Young Sparrow Hawk!

Before the events that transpired in Kiln Fire Woods, the most famous player from Asskickers United was Young Sparrow Hawk. He was someone who had firmly held the top spot on the level leaderboards ever since snatching it away from Heaven Breaker. His popularity among the player base was also extremely high.

Young Sparrow Hawk was also a legend!

“These guys are your classmates?” Tang Yao asked. After receiving a nod of confirmation from Nie Yan, he extended his hand and said, “It’s nice to meet you all. I’m Young Sparrow Hawk.”

Zhai Hao and the others were dumbfounded and flustered. The thought of someone as famous as Young Sparrow Hawk going out of his way just to greet them was so unexpected and flattering that they were rendered speechless. When they finally overcame the initial shock, they gathered themselves and returned the greeting.

“The pleasure is all ours!”

The group conversed while making their way to the Rocky Plains,

a Level 30 map filled with Stone Giants.

This was the first time Zhai Hao and the others faced such high-level monsters, so they were a little nervous. However, what happened next left them completely stupefied.

They were stunned on the spot as they saw Nie Yan disappear into the forest. Before long, he returned with a long train of Stone Giants pursuing him like a massive tide.

Tang Yao started casting his magic, finishing the chant in an incredibly short period of time. The skies were blanketed with red clouds, and the skies were immediately filled with streaks of red as fireballs hurtled down.

Zhai Hao and the others felt cold sweat drip down their foreheads. Nie Yan was right in the middle of the spell's range! As soon as it landed, he would definitely be annihilated. How could Tang Yao do this? How was this not team killing?

However, the group saw Nie Yan suddenly disappear, vanishing without a trace.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」One after another, fireballs crashed down on the mobs, causing a sheet of damage values to rise up into the sky. A few seconds later, a pile of corpses littered the ground.

These Stone Giants stood no chance against the unrivalled destructive might of Tang Yao's magic damage.



Zhai Hao and the others were still looking for traces of Nie Yan, worried that he had been caught in the blast. At this moment, Nie Yan suddenly appeared in the distance, leading another wave of Stone Giants towards them.

Just as the group started picking up all the loot from the first wave, Tang Yao unleashed another destructive AoE spell and wiped out the second wave, then moved on to an area with more Stone Giants.

Levelling became much easier after the release of the expansion. Add this to the fact that Stone Giants gave a generous amount of experience, and Zhai Hao and the others heard level up jingles almost non-stop. A person in the group would level up one moment, and the moment after, another person would level up. This sort of speed was terrifying.

This method of leveling up was ridiculously effective. So it was no longer a mystery how Young Sparrow Hawk was consistently able to maintain first place in the standings.

Zhai Hao and the others were happy beyond belief. Previously, they would have to spend at least two or three days grinding just to level up once. But now, all of them had levelled up twice in just half an hour. This was partially due to the experience required to level up being reduced, but Tang Yao's terrifying mobbing speed definitely contributed greatly as well.

The entire area was piled high with the corpses of Stone Giants.

Seeing Tang Yao's terrifying cast rate that never seemed to end, Zhai Hao and the others were astonished. Did Tang Yao's spells not cost mana? The sight of him shooting out spells like a machine gun was simply too shocking.

The player who firmly held his position at the top of the level leaderboards, so this was how his legend was born!

With such a terrifying casting speed, Tang Yao would easily be able to maintain first place on the rankings if he trained like this normally.

Two hours later, Zhai Hao and the others had enjoyed the feeling of power-leveiling like a rocket. Zhai Hao had reached Level 30, while the rest were around Level 28 and 29.

Nie Yan got back to Level 27. He allocated all of his free stat points to Dexterity. As for Strength, he had already used his 500 phantom stat points to get his strength up to 800. He could now equip the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow, so for the time being, not allocating any stat points into Strength was no problem.

"We still have a lot of things to do, so we'll be leaving first. We'll bring you guys levelling again some other time," Nie Yan said to Zhai Hao and the others. He had already set aside two hours out of his incredibly busy schedule. After this, he and Tang Yao would have to lead a guild expedition.

"Alright, you guys go ahead." Zhai Hao and the others clearly

understood that people like Nie Yan and Tang Yao were extremely busy. They were extremely lucky to have gained these two hours due to the benevolence of Nie Yan, and they had no right to ask for more given the the fact they had already gained a lot of levels.

“Some of you guys have already entered Warriors United. If you want to join Asskickers United, you’ll have to get in like everyone else; otherwise, it wouldn’t be fair to others. I have to be impartial; friends are no exceptions. However, I can still gift you guys some merit points,” Nie Yan said. As the guild leader, he definitely had to uphold the rules of the guild, so he could only do this much for these old brothers of his.

Nie Yan rewarded each of them with 500 merit points. Afterwards, he and Tang Yao bid farewell to Zhai Hao, Li Rui, and the others. He had just received a notification from Guo Hai. The 600 elites of the guild had all been gathered!

## Chapter 250 – Return Of Aqua Smoke Stub

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Even after they were gone, Nie Yan and Tang Yao were the subjects of fervent discussion for Zhai Hao, Li Rui, and the rest of their group. Those two competed at the highest level!

“Xia Ling, do you think Nie Yan is really going after Xie Yao?” Zhai Hao questioned thoughtfully.

“How couldn’t he? They even know each other from outside of school!” As Xie Yao’s best friend, Xia Ling naturally had to insist on her preferred outcome.

“Looks like everyone else is out of luck!” Zhai Hao laughed. None of their classmates could even compare with Nie Yan in terms of qualifications.

“Nie Yan is so awesome! He can casually give out 500 merit points to each of us. That’s enough to exchange for several pieces of good equipment!” Li Rui exclaimed. The best equipment they owned was only worth around 200 merit points at most.

But the gear was secondary. The fact that they got to meet two legendary figures, their idols, was the best thing to come out of this get together. If not for Nie Yan swearing them to secrecy, they would’ve definitely blabbed about today’s events to all their friends.

“That bastard Liu Rui is only Level 28, and he thinks he’s such hot shit. Now that I’m Level 30, I think it’s a good time to step on

his ego a little. There's always a sky above the sky! If we compare him to Nie Yan, he won't even amount to dregs!" Zhai Hao said, the memory of his crushing defeat to Liu Rui flashing before his eyes. He definitely wanted a rematch, so he could get back some face!

Zhai Hao recalled the scene of Nie Yan sending Liu Rui flying with a kick. It was simply amazing! No wonder he was so good at the game. On top of this, his personality made people very convinced. Even though he was in such a high position, he didn't behave ostentatiously in the slightest. He was actually quite modest, low-key, and easy-going, albeit a bit devious at times.

The group continued to chat in high spirits.

At this moment, Nie Yan and Tang Yao rushed back to the guild headquarters. A large crowd had assembled around the plaza in front of the Asskickers United guild headquarters. These players were the elites of the guild, and they all wore equipment of at least Gold-grade, with practically nobody sporting around Silver-grade equipment any more. They discussed fervently.

"Say, what do you think the boss gathered all of us here for?"

"I don't think anyone knows. Let's just wait for him."

The best players of the guild were all gathered in one place. This kind of manpower could accomplish almost anything!

“The guild leader is here!”

The crowd grew excited, as they parted to two sides, opening up a path in the middle.

“Greetings to the guild leader!”

“Welcome back, boss!”

Everyone greeted in unison. Any bystander would be able to tell the sincere respect they held for Nie Yan.

The name Nirvana Flame carried the glory of Asskickers United, a moral pillar responsible for creating the legend of the guild and guiding them to a momentous rise. From having nothing to owning everything. From being small and fragile to becoming the most powerful behemoth. From less than 500 members to over 50,000. From being viewed as an ant in the eyes of the player base to being the hot topic through all corners of the game. He swept through all obstacles to make them the strongest guild in Calore! In return, they were filled with devotion and reverence toward their guild leader.

Nie Yan acknowledged the greetings of the guild members.

Nie Yan spotted Yao Yao, Moon Child, Yu Lan, Plain Boiled Water, and the rest. He walked up to greet them.

“Good to see you guys again.”

“Hello, guild leader!” Plain Boiled Water and the rest hurriedly responded.

Yao Yao appeared to be a bit off as she met eyes with Nie Yan, who showed her a simple smile. Her heart raced as the two figures in her mind merged together.

It was worth noting that Yao Yao, who was dressed in pure-white robes, put in a considerate amount of effort into her appearance—her long hair tied in a ponytail behind her back, her pure and innocent expression which evoked urges in the hearts of all men, and a pair of limpid eyes that sparkled with intelligence. She pursed her lips into a smile, shallow dimples exposed on her fair cheeks. Her beauty was simply too dazzling.

Moon Child and Yu Lan stood off to the side and quietly gossipped about how Yao Yao acted different from her usual self today.

Nie Yan quickly averted his gaze, afraid that he would be ensnared if he looked directly into her eyes any longer.

Nie Yan turned to Moon Child and Yu Lan with a smile before moving on.

Yao Yao felt a sense of emptiness in her heart as she gazed at Nie Yan’s back. In the game, he received the admiration of tens of thousands of players. Standing high above the clouds, how would he ever take notice of an insignificant person like her? However,

she could still take solace in the fact that she would get to see him every day since they were deskmates.

“Everyone is here,” Guo Huai reported. Even he was in the dark on Nie Yan’s plans.

Nie Yan took a headcount. Including him, there were 600 players altogether. Split into groups of 20, that was 30 teams. This was quite an imposing force.

Guo Hai returned with the potions Nie Yan requested from the Starry Night Potion Shop and began distributing them. Everyone received at least two Intermediate Health Potions. The Fighters and Berserkers at the front all received at least five in addition to a ton of other potions, in case something happened.

They also restocked on some general items.

“How many Priests in our guild have Junior Revive?” Nie Yan asked. This spell was extremely important. It would help them avoid significant losses.

“We have four in total. Leader Young Seven, Black Heaven, Ten Li Painted Muslin, and Moon Child. I’ve assigned all of them to different teams,” Guo Huai said. They were currently the four best Priests in Asskickers United. Priests with Junior Revive were truly too hard to come by.

Nie Ya was startled at the name Ten Li Painted Muslin. Guo Huai



also managed to recruit her?

As one of the Seven Archbishops in the previous timeline, Ten Li Painted Muslin had been one of the most famous professional players in the game. However, she operated differently from most professionals. She sold her services to various guilds, temporarily joining their elite teams in exchange for a hefty sum. Rumour had it that she would charge anywhere between tens to thousands of gold for a single dungeon run. Plus, she got priority on any Priest equipment that dropped. Although her prices were exorbitant, many guilds were still willing to pay the price to invite one of the Seven Archbishops.

Nie Yan was elated at the fact that three of the Seven Archbishops belonged to Asskickers United! If they weren't unrivalled already, they definitely would be so in the future!

Thanks to Asskickers United growing increasingly powerful, becoming a place where elites converged, Guo Huai was finding it easier and easier to recruit people, bringing more elites into the guild every day. This effectively created a positive feedback loop of skilled recruits.

Even Guo Huai was deeply moved by how things had developed. When he went to recruit players in the past, people wouldn't necessarily pay attention to him even if he whispered them. But now, talented players were willing to consider an offer as long as the terms were reasonable. On average, most players were willing to accept the offer and join. Some even abandoned their previous guild without a second thought.

The bar to join was incredibly high. Those the guild went out of its way for to recruit were elites amongst elites, and any player that received an invitation would instantly skyrocket in value. Many guilds would descend on them and try to snatch them away with generous offers. But of course, Asskickers United was still the first choice for anyone with half a brain, even if there were slightly better offers from other guilds.

As such, Guo Huai could now stand proudly with his back straight when he was out recruiting.

These six hundred players could be considered the cream of the crop. No other guild could field such a lineup!

Nie Yan took a final look at the team compositions. Since the Priest's Revive skill was only effective within the same team, he decided to do a bit of rearranging.

“We’re going to make some adjustments to the teams. Those who I call up, withdraw from your current team, then create a new one!” Nie Yan issued out order after order as the ranks were reshuffled.

After taking on the role of guild leader in Asskickers United, Nie Yan noticed a few subtle changes in his temperament, such as subconsciously speaking in an imposing tone. If he wanted the brothers under him to listen to his commands, a figure of authority was needed.

Nie Yan had the 600 players under him remake their teams.

Young Seven, Black Heaven, Ten Li Painted Muslin, and Moon Child's teams especially underwent great changes. Each of them now had at least 10 Warriors—most of them being Fighters, along with one or two Berserkers—5 Paladins, and the rest were Priests.

Although this sort of composition had very weak attack power, a team filled with tanks and support classes possessed incredible resilience and sustainability. It was practically an impregnable steel fortress. Nie Yan planned to have these four teams escort the Mages in the center. If they encountered a boss, he would naturally have them go up to tank!

Nie Yan lightly nodded his head. Everything was more or less settled. He also joined one of the teams.

“Our expedition today is to clear the entirety of Everlasting City!” Nie Yan announced. They had previously only levelled in the outer district of the map. But now, they were going to kill their way to the very core! They would have to face countless Level 40 Elites and even some Lords.

As long as they could obtain the Energy Core of Everlasting City, it would be worth it no matter how many losses they suffered!

Undying Scoundrel and the rest couldn't help but get excited. This time, the boss decided to clear a Level 40 map! Almost all the elite members of the guild were only around Level 27. That was more than a 10 level difference. Would their attacks even deal any damage to the Mechanical Golems?

Nie Yan had already included this level disparity in his calculations. In the past, these players had no hope of clearing the map of Mechanical Golems at their current level. However, after the recent level suppression changes from the expansion, they had nothing to fear.

The equipment that dropped in Everlasting City was extremely enticing, to say nothing of the fact that the drop rate was increased manyfold when exploring the map for the first time! Gearing up the guild members with a few pieces of Dark Gold-grade equipment would become an easy feat. On top of all this, the map still held an extremely precious item that would move the hearts of any player, and that was the Energy Core of Everlasting City! Something like this would be very helpful to the guild's growth!

With this expedition, Nie Yan would improve the teamwork of his top players while also helping them level. This would prove vital in helping them conquer strongholds. After helping out Holy Empire, Asskickers United would be about ready to capture a Basic Stronghold for themselves.

Right at that moment, Guo Huai turned to tell Nie Yan, "Smoke Stub is back. According to reports, Withered Leaf has split up, with only 200 leaving with him."

Nie Yan furrowed his brows. "What happened to Withered Leaf?"

Guo Huai could only shake his head. "It's still unclear. Let's wait until Smoke Stub returns, and we can ask him then."

## Chapter 251 – Plasma Core Golem

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Nie Yan asked Tang Yao to buy 200 gold's worth of Basic Magic Bombs over at Tasoyi Village as a safety precaution. Although this was a bit wasteful, it couldn't be helped. Not long after Tang Yao departed, a crowd of players in plain clothing walked into the Asskickers United guild headquarters. Leading them was Aqua Smoke Stub with several familiar figures closely in tow—Cold Peak Absolute Sword, Wood Grace, and Samsara Lord. There were over 200 people in the group, consisting of almost all the core elites of Withered Leaf.

In stark contrast to the swaggering manner these players displayed when they first showed up at the Asskickers United guild headquarters, they looked rather sullen.

Smoke Stub immediately walked up to Nie Yan.

“What happened?” Nie Yan asked, concerned by the bedraggled figures before him. Smoke Stub was noticeably different from his normal self. His powerful equipment was gone, but so were many of the crease lines on his forehead. He seemed to give off an air of carefreeness and self-confidence.

“The Tuoba Family head ordered Withered Leaf to merge into Victorious Return. That didn't sit well with me, so I quit and my brothers decided to leave with me. We had to return our equipment to the organization,” Smoke Stub replied, the forced smile on his face failing to hide the bitterness underneath.

Tuoba Time walked up, flabbergasted by Smoke Stub's disheveled state.

"What happened to you?" Tuoba Time asked as well. He had just missed the story behind their departure, so he was rather puzzled.

Smoke Stub recounted the entire sequence of events in detail.

When Tuoba Time heard about Tuoba Hongye forcing Smoke Stub to pay the full early termination fee—despite the latter only quitting due to the unwelcome merger of Withered Leaf into Victorious Return—he grew infuriated. "He's really gone too far this time! Smoke Stub, I'll see what I can do for you!" Even though Smoke Stub had worked day and night over the past six years to earn the Tuoba Family a great profit, Tuoba Hongye was perfectly fine booting him out the door with nothing to his name? This was too cold-hearted!

"Forget it. No point crying over spilled milk. I've already cut all ties with Withered Leaf anyway," Smoke Stub dissuaded. In the entire Tuoba Family, the only person he got along with was Tuoba Time. He turned to Nie Yan and asked, "We had to give up our equipment. You won't turn us all away, right?"

"How could I possibly? There's plenty of equipment in the guild treasury. You guys can take your pick. The silver lining to this is that you've regained your freedom. Money lost can still be earned back. And you all still have your skill, right? So what's there to be afraid of? Asskickers United will always have your backs. We never mistreat our own," Nie Yan replied in a sincere tone. Smoke Stub and the others withdrawing from Withered Leaf was proof that

their hearts stood with Asskickers United. How could he not accept them?

“You have my gratitude, brother!” Smoke Stub exclaimed, sounding a little emotional. Any more words would be superfluous.

“Tuoba, what’s your family’s situation like?” Nie Yan asked. He noticed Tuoba Time wasn’t particularly fond of the Tuoba Family head.

Tuoba Time pondered for a moment. “The Tuoba Family is divided into many factions. Each one owns shares of the family business. Tuoba Hongye controls 26% of the shares, and Tuoba Fengyuan controls 22%. The two factions are like oil and water. The remaining shares are scattered among the various members of the family. For example, I control 15% while most don’t control more than 10%. Tuoba Hongye’s faction holds a majority of the shares and sits firmly on the seat of family head. I belong to a neutral faction.” He gave a brief summary. The internal affairs of a large influential family like his couldn’t be fully explained in just a few lines.

Nie Yan nodded. No wonder Tuoba Time could maintain such an aloof position, unencumbered by the disputes within his family, where he could wander around inside the game, hunting mobs and levelling up at his leisure. Otherwise, there was no way he could be so carefree.

“In short, I have nothing to do with this matter. So you guys can’t go putting it on my head, alright?” Tuoba Time laughed.

Aside from speaking out on Smoke Stub's behalf, he would rather not get involved in the internal struggles of his family.

Nie Yan observed Tuoba Time closely. Was he really the unambitious sort? This was hard to believe. His inaction was probably only temporary. With 15% of the shares, though nowhere close enough to compete for the position of family head, he could easily deal a fatal blow to one faction by joining the other. By remaining neutral, neither faction dared to actively provoke him. Instead, they would offer all sorts of generous terms to rope him in. It was clear this was the wisest decision.

Nie Yan wasn't too clear on the circumstances of the Tuoba Family. However, based on the information he just received and his understanding of Tuoba Time's character, his intuition told him that the final victor of this struggle wouldn't necessarily be Tuoba Hongye or Tuoba Fengyuan, but rather Tuoba Time who had been silently gathering strength.

Nie Yan decided he would have to conduct a proper investigation before making a judgment on the matter. The Tuoba Family allying with the Cao Xu Century Financial Group posed an immense threat to him. It was imperative he found a way to prevent this from happening.

The combined power of the Cao Xu Century Financial Group and the Tuoba Family would create a terrifying colossus the like of which has never been seen before.

With Withered Leaf splitting up, Smoke Stub led his most loyal brothers to join Asskickers United. These players were the former



elites of Withered Leaf! So long as they were given decent gear, they would return to their former strength. They would be a huge boon to the guild.

“You guys can feel at ease staying in Asskickers United. If there’s anything you need, just speak up,” Nie Yan said. He promised Smoke Stub’s group that they could still operate as professional players like before.

Smoke Stub nodded. “In ten days at most, I’ll be able to get the gear quality of these brothers back to what it used to be!”

Nie Yan added Smoke Stub and the others back to the guild, then left Guo Huai to deal with the rest. All the best items in the treasury were made available for them to select from. After all, without decent gear, how could they run dungeons to grind out better equipment?

“We’re about to set off on an expedition. If anything comes up, just contact me,” Nie Yan said. The current gear quality of Smoke Stub and the others was lacking, leaving them unable to participate in the expedition. This could only be described as regrettable.

Smoke Stub nodded. His present goal was to regear the brothers that followed him out of Withered Leaf. Without decent equipment, they wouldn’t be able to progress, let alone participate in any guild activities.

Nie Yan bid farewell to Smoke Stub, Cold Peak, and the others,

then led the crowd of players he had assembled to Everlasting City.

Even though Nie Yan's group cleared the Mechanical Golems crowding the streets of Everlasting City during their previous visit, all of them had respawned following the daily reset.

The group of 600 players arrived in Everlasting City and started clearing out the mobs in an orderly fashion.

Resplendent Bladelight led a vanguard of Warriors forward to attract the aggro of the Mechanical Golems, while the Mages in the backline unleashed a storm of magic which rained down mercilessly on the mobs, causing a blanket of damage values to rise up into the air.

These Mages only dealt about 50–60 damage per hit to the Mechanical Golems. But with such concentrated firepower, the mobbing speed was still extremely quick.

The golems collapsed as their lifebars depleted. Before long, the street was piled high with mountains of scrap metal.

These ordinary Mechanical Golems weren't Nie Yan's goal. Instead, he was aiming for the inner district of Everlasting City!

"If anyone dies, just revive at your corpse. Our destination is 7,000 meters south of here. Running there will take about 15 minutes. Remember the coordinates, so you don't end up getting lost trying to regroup with us," Nie Yan said.

All the players nodded in assent.

Everyone here was part of Asskickers United, so there was no need to worry about equipment being stolen. But the experience penalty for dying was pretty harsh. Fortunately, there were many people to provide support. As long as there weren't any large mishaps, they would be able to deal with Elite-class monsters or below without suffering any casualties.

Nie Yan led the crowd of players through twists and turns from street to street. This was a shortcut which would lead them directly to the inner district of the city. If they followed the regular path from the main gate, it would take them at least five hours. However, with this shortcut, they could crawl to the inner district and still be there within 20 minutes.

Tang Yao fired out spells like a machine gun, clearing away the final group of mobs, then asked, "Where are we going?" His sense of direction was atrocious, so after all these twists and turns, he was completely lost.

"We're going to the inner district of the city. There's probably going to be a Lord there. I want everyone to prepare themselves. Be mindful of your coordination," Nie Yan warned. If they weren't careful when dealing with a Lord, they would very likely be wiped out.

Just at this moment, the Thieves scouting the path ahead reported back with new information. They had encountered eight

Elites!

Nie Yan arrived at the front of the group. Gazing into the distance, he saw eight enormous golems in a small plaza. They were over five meters tall, and were covered in thick azure metal plates. Each step they took shook the ground, as they lumbered around.

Nie Yan activated Transcendent Insight and inspected one of them.

Plasma Core Golem (Elite): Level 40

Health: 12,000/12,000

These were Plasma Core Golems. They were ranked relatively high among Machine-type monsters. They were pretty tough to deal with. Furthermore, Nie Yan remembered that the Plasma Core Golems in Everlasting City possessed a Quake skill which would stun all enemies around them. Combined with their frightening combat strength, they were fearful foes.

“Bladelight, you take care of the three on the right. Yi Yan, take the two on the left. The other Warriors will have your backs.” Nie Yan passed down commands one at a time. The 30 teams of 20 started advancing into the plaza, with the Mages moving to disperse all around while trying to find suitable vantage points to attack from. The Warriors slowly encircled the Plasma Core

Golems. Once Nie Yan gave the order, they would charge into battle.

Under Nie Yan's instructions, the players moved to their assigned positions.

Even veterans like Bladelight and Young Seven couldn't help but admire Nie Yan's commanding ability.

This was the first guild expedition for these guild members, so they were a little disorderly. But they were still elites, after all, and so were quick to adapt. They performed extremely well, all things considered. When they got more accustomed to working together after a few more guild expeditions, they would definitely be moving as a single unit.

# Chapter 252 – First To Explore The Map

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“Attack! Fighters, secure the aggro!” As soon as Nie Yan gave out the order, several Fighters roared and charged at the Plasma Core Golems.

「Klang! Klang! Klang!」The heavy sound of metal meeting metal rang out as shields and swords collided with the bodies of the Plasma Core Golems.

Bladelight and Yi Yan took action almost simultaneously, leading away five of the Plasma Core Golems, while the other Fighters firmly locked down the remaining three.

“Split them up!” Nie Yan ordered tensely. Despite his wealth of experience in Conviction, this was his first time commanding such a large force. He had never taken part in these sorts of expeditions in his past life, but he had seen them in videos. [Although he had never eaten pork, he did have the fortune of seeing a pig run.](#) So no major problems arose.

It’s an idiom describing someone who lacks personal experience doing a task such as driving a car, skateboarding, etc., but has some knowledge of it through watching others.

The Fighters split the Plasma Core Golems into three different groups, three or four players on each enemy. While shielded by others, Bladelight unleashed a relentless barrage of attacks on one of the golems, slowly pulling it toward an empty area nearby.

Shield Bash!

Bladelight dealt a heavy blow to the Plasma Core Golem with his shield, staggering it back several steps. It immediately charged at him in a fit of anger.

「Klang! Klang! Klang!」Bladelight activated Guard Stance as a flurry of powerful blows rained down mercilessly on his shield.

Bladelight let out a Demoralizing Shout, interrupting the Plasma Core Golem for a brief instant, giving several Fighters the opportunity to surround the golem in a pincer attack.

Seeing the golem's aggro firmly locked onto Bladelight, Nie Yan issued the next set of orders. "Mages, attack!"

Spell after spell flew through the air, converging onto the Plasma Core Golem. The unrelenting barrage exploded on its body with loud bangs, causing a long string of damage values to float up from its head.

"Sparrow Hawk, mind the aggro!" Nie Yan reminded after seeing Tang Yao unleash an endless stream of spells. The damage he put out was too ferocious!

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Three critical hits landed in succession.

What terrifying damage!

Most of the Mages were dealing around 40–50 damage, with some of the stronger players hitting in the low 90s. Although a spell would occasionally crit for relatively high damage, it would still do no more than 120 damage.

The Plasma Core Golem's aggro immediately shifted. It wanted to charge past Bladelight and go after the Mages in the backline

The crowd of Mages showed signs of panic. If the Plasma Core Golem's aggro got out of control and it rushed into their midst, a one-sided massacre would be the inevitable outcome.

Tang Yao stopped attacking. If he continued, he might even single-handedly cause the entire expedition to fail.

The moment he noticed the golem's aggro shift, Bladelight slammed a Shield Bash into the golem's body and followed up with a Taunt.

The Plasma Core Golem's aggro was back on Bladelight. After several successive attacks, he finally managed to pull the golem back to the previous spot.

Tang Yao wiped the bead of cold sweat from his forehead. That was a close call. Were it not for Bladelight rescuing the situation in the nick of time, he reckoned he would've been the target of everyone's condemnation. He no longer dared to act in such an



unbridled manner, instead controlling his damage output.

After ensuring the aggro was under control, Nie Yan turned to the Mages and ordered, “Continue!”

Plasma Core Golems weren’t particularly difficult opponents. It was just that today was their first time working together, so they were yet to familiarize themselves with each other’s capabilities. Fortunately, they were all skilled players, so nothing major came out of the mistake.

Under the ferocious barrage of spells, the Plasma Core Golem’s health was gradually whittled away. With a clanking sound, it collapsed into a pile of scrap metal.

“What dropped?” Nie Yan asked eagerly. Since it was a Level 40 Plasma Core Golem, anything it dropped was bound to be exceptional.

“A Level 40 Gold-grade Azure Staff, and some Level 40 leg armour from the Everlasting Set Series, Gold-grade as well,” Bladelight replied, picking up two pieces of equipment off the ground.

The Plasma Core Golems had a 20% chance to drop a piece of equipment from the Everlasting Gold Set. That chance was increased to 50% for the first people to explore the map. This was why Nie Yan specifically chose this place for their first expedition.

Glancing at the Everlasting Gold Set's properties, Nie Yan noticed that everything, including defense, was roughly 10% higher than that of the Everlasting Silver Set. On top of this, the set bonus was a Rank 8 Shield. It was good enough to make even the non-Fighter players drool.

Nie Yan gauged the properties of the two pieces of equipment and decided to reward everyone with 10 merit points.

Bladelight proceeded to pull the next Plasma Core Golem.

Having experienced their first fight as a group, everyone's teamwork became much smoother. The Mages stuck to a tempo that dealt damage without accidentally shifting the aggro, and the Priests acted in tandem to keep the frontline healthy.

The health bars of the Fighters fluctuated up and down constantly. Several of them even came close to dying a few times. Fortunately, the Priests were led by Leader Young Seven, Black Heaven, and others whose skills were on point. Together, they managed to save everyone on the brink of death and heal them back to full.

After a while, the Plasma Core Golem they were fighting fell to 30% health. It let out a massive roar and unleashed a Quake, stunning everyone in its range.

The Warriors couldn't budge an inch.

A single blow from the Plasma Core Golem sent Bladelight staggering several steps back. After which a gentle radiance fell over him, restoring his health back to full.

Another blow from the Plasma Core Golem sent a nearby Berserker flying out. After falling limply to the ground, that player didn't get back up. The golem moved on to its next target, slaughtering three Warriors in quick succession.

"Keep attacking with your spells, don't panic!" Nie Yan calmly commanded the Mages.

Spells rained down on the Plasma Core Golem without pause.

When the Plasma Core Golem finally broke through the frontline and charged toward the Mages, Bladelight regained control. He brought the golem's advance to a firm halt.

The Plasma Core Golem collided with Bladelight's heavy shield, causing a deep metallic klang to reverberate out.

The concentrated rain of magic continued to bombard the Plasma Core Golem. The golem finally could no longer endure assault. Its health fell to zero, and it collapsed to the ground.

Bladelight let out a sigh of relief, then proceeded to pick up the drops—a Level 40 Gold-grade Leather Chest Piece and a Tinkerer Recipe. Even though three Warriors had died, it could still be considered a decisive victory.

Nie Yan gave 100 merit points to each of the three Warriors who had just died. Everyone else received 10 merit points.

Bladelight rested for a bit before moving on to aggro the next Plasma Core Golem.

One after the other, Plasma Core Golems collapsed to the ground. After finishing off all eight, they had gathered five pieces of the Everlasting Gold Set.

The eight Plasma Core Golems gave an extremely generous amount of experience. Nie Yan looked at his experience bar. It had grown by 17%. He reckoned everyone else also received a similar amount. This kind of levelling speed couldn't be considered quick, but it was still decent.

The group took a short break, during which Ten Li Painted Muslin and Moon Child began reviving the members who had died.

“I noticed we sure have a lot of pretty girls in our group.” Nie Yan chuckled. Yao Yao, Yu Lan, One Strike Vow, Moon Child, Ten Li Painted Muslin... every single one of them was a rarely seen beauty. As for beauties a level below them, there were almost 30. The rest were all relatively ordinary-looking.

Out of 600 players, almost 80 were female. This sort of female-to-male ratio could be considered pretty high.

Nie Yan led the group toward the inner district. After passing through a thick metal gate, they were greeted by a completely different scene. The buildings in the inner district were constructed out of metal, with steel bars and bolts everywhere. It resembled an impenetrable steel fortress.

There were Mechanical Golems roaming the streets. Occasionally, one or two Elite Plasma Core Golems could be spotted among them.

There was a total of five Lords in Everlasting City. If Nie Yan's group could clear them all, they would obtain five Energy Key Fragments. After combining the fragments together to form the whole key, they would get the chance to obtain the Energy Core of Everlasting City. In addition to this, according to the information on the official websites, the first group of players to explore Everlasting City could obtain some other items that would make countless people drool. One such item was the Shattered Sword, a Dark Gold-grade weapon. A total of three were scattered throughout the map. Even though it could be equipped at Level 30, its attack power exceeded that of ordinary Level 50 Gold-grade weapons. It was extremely domineering. Another such item was the Level 40 Staff of Divine Rites. It was one of the best staffs for support-type Priests, giving a 130 point boost to Heal. Only two could be obtained in this map.

If Nie Yan's group obtained the Shattered Sword, it would definitely be given to Warriors like Monochrome or Edgeless. As for the Staff of Divine Rite which greatly boosted the healing capability of a Priest, it was of unimaginable use to any team.

Everything here was extremely familiar to Nie Yan. As he carefully recalled his memories of Everlasting City's inner district from his past life, he remembered that there were two treasure chests near the entrance. However, he didn't know their exact locations.

"You guys keep exploring deeper. Young Seven, take command for a bit," Nie Yan said. He wouldn't feel too assured handing this task over to Tang Yao due to his lack of self-control. As for Bladelight, he already had his plate full by being the main tank for the group.

After handing over command to Young Seven, Nie Yan went off to find the treasure chests. He estimated it would only take him 15 minutes at most, so no problems should occur during that time.

"Alright." Young Seven nodded. He took up the role of commanding everyone.

The group advanced deeper into the inner district, sweeping away all the Mechanical Golems and Plasma Core Golems in the streets. Their progress was slow but stable.

Nie Yan entered an ancient building. He recalled that it was around here where the treasure chests were found, and started searching. There were signs that intelligent creatures used to live here such as chairs, tables, pots, etc., but they had long since disappeared. All that remained were these relics. He found books written in the goblin language scattered across the floor.

Since goblins weren't creatures that belonged to the Righteous Faction of Order, Nie Yan didn't understand their language. Without the aid of some sort of special magical item, he wasn't able to read these characters, so he could only move on.

He also saw some half-completed Mechanical Golems put out on display. After searching around the room, Nie Yan finally found what he was looking for. It was a locked dark gold chest cover in exquisite runes which flickered a dark luster.

Nie Yan remembered that the chest that spawned here was silver. Who could've known that when he finally found it, it was dark gold. This was probably due to him being one of the first to explore the map. He was extremely excited.

## Chapter 253 – Leaper Ring

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It was universally agreed by the major guilds that the rewards for being the first to clear a map far exceeded those from regular grinding. It was simple to see why; the equipment drop rate was greatly increased, as was the chance of encountering gold chests. Even the much rarer dark gold chests were a lot more common. Though the allure of Gold and Dark Gold equipment was great, the difficulty of being the first to clear a map was similarly great, which made many guilds think twice before taking such a risk.

The challenges of clearing a map for the first time lay in the increased number of Elites, and at times even Lords. Entire forces getting wiped out was a common sight, and if such failures repeated themselves several times over, even top elites would degrade into no more than average players. The risk of falling so far behind was a tall hurdle for most guilds, so only the best of the best would dare to organize a pioneering expedition. But even then, they only chose maps suited to their level. A single word described those who attempted high-level maps—suicidal!

This caused the vast majority of dark gold chests to land in the hands of the top few guilds, while everyday players and smaller guilds would find it tough to acquire even one. There were also tragedies that often occurred, like finding a dark gold chest only to discover that your Lockpicking skill was insufficient to open it. You could do nothing but allow that wondrous opportunity to slip through your fingers.

Nie Yan rested his hand on the chest. He fortunately had a Lockpicking Specialist skill that could open chests beyond his level, though it was just barely enough.



Looks like I'll have to find a few more low-level chests to train my Lockpicking skill. Nie Yan bent down and began to unlock the chest. The progress bar inched ever so slowly forwards; it appeared that this would take a bit of time.

Nie Yan pulled up the game's website and browsed the ongoing property auctions. By now, there was an extremely high volume of bidders, and the bids for some properties were as high as 1,500 gold. What's more, they were trending ever higher! He decided to hold off from bidding until near the end of the auction. By then, he could swoop in and snatch away whatever property caught his fancy.

Written in large and bright text, there was a piece of news listed on the website regarding credit conversion. The system of credit conversion would be set up similar to a financial exchange. For instance, if you wanted to sell gold or a piece of equipment for credits, you could do so based on current rates, or talk privately with the equipment holder and negotiate prices. The buyer would be using real-life credits to purchase the seller's in-game equipment or gold.

These exchanges were all monitored by federal regulatory commissions. Due to regulations, it was prohibited to directly purchase goods in reality with in-game currency. To do so, a person would have to first convert in-game currency or equivalent to credits through official channels and then purchase the goods. This was done to prevent in-game currency from replacing credits and disrupting the natural flow of the market.

The credit conversion system would be released as soon as the property auctions came to an end, and it would immediately introduce a surge of capital into Conviction. This surge would continue to push the prices of equipment and in-game currency upwards as large investors built up their structure and strength.

It would also greatly stimulate the development of player businesses in the game, and this was clear from the recent performance of the Union of Assassins. Through the attention brought by Sleepy Fox, Kill Love, and Fa Lan, their numbers spiked. The number of professional players broke through 12,000 and the number of clients broke past 8,000. Every day, the union received over 500 requests and acted as the intermediary for thousands of trades. More importantly, Nie Yan's net income was over 300 gold a day.

Under Nie Yan's control were two of the most profitable auction houses, countless properties, the Starry Night Potion Shop and its numerous branches scattered across most major cities, and of course, Asskickers United's full strength. He'd be able to hold his own even when Cao Xu entered the playing field.

Nie Yan had enough money on hand to purchase at least one more property. He needed to make sure to get himself a stronghold before the credit conversion went live, so at least he'd have something to fight against Cao Xu's vast wealth.

It had only been a month or so since the game's initial release, but Nie Yan had already set up a stable business by laying down each path with care and reached his current position. He was very satisfied with these results.

The dark gold chest clicked open, interrupting Nie Yan's train of thoughts and prompting him to reach around the chest. He fished out two items.

Staff of Dark Rite (Dark Gold)

Requirements: Level 40

Properties: Damage 332–338, Intelligence +20; Dark Bloom (Rank 5): 50% Increased damage against Undead or Machine types

Restrictions: Mage; can only be equipped by a member of the Righteous Guardians of Order.

The Staff of Dark Rite was currently one of the best weapons for a Mage. Dark Gold staffs were quite rare as well, but unfortunately this had a level restriction of 40.

Nie Yan posted the stats into the guild chat and asked, “Anyone want this staff?”

“Boss, how many merit points?” asked Undying Scoundrel. It was a rule to purchase all equipment with merit points, and Nie Yan couldn't be the one to pick who to give it to since that would complicate matters a bit. The fairest way was to set a price, and let

the guild members decide among themselves.

“Level 40 Dark Gold—8,000 points; 20 Intelligence—6,000 points; Rank 5 Dark Bloom—10,000 points; Extra damage—10,000 points,” Nie Yan said. He based the price on the weapon’s properties.

“34,000! Let me see here... I don’t have enough. Any one of you want it?” Undying Scoundrel looked at his teammates. If there wasn’t someone who’d take it, then his team all together should have enough for it.

In the guild, elite members were able to gather equipment and gold very quickly, so they could exchange them for merit points by donating to the guild. Dark Gold equipment was rare, and Dark Gold equipment at their level was even rarer. Even now, they as elites only wore Gold equipment. So when a Level 40 Dark Gold staff appeared right in front of them, how could they let this opportunity pass by? Its properties were far too good, and they would soon reach the level requirement as well.

“I have enough here,” said Summer Bug. He hadn’t even touched his merit points, so he now had a total of 51,000.

“Damn, what a guy. You’ve saved up so many points!” Undying Scoundrel flinched, glancing at Summer Bug’s points in the guild chat. Who could possibly compete against him? “Ahh, whatever. It’s all yours.”

Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, and Resplendent Bladelight

were some of the wealthiest players in the guild. Typical elites had over a thousand merit points, and that was on the high end already. A great number of guild members only had a few hundred in store and would only look for ways to gather more if they needed equipment. It was quite staggering to see people like them deal with merit points in the tens of thousands.

Such were the strong!

Since there didn't seem to be any disagreements, Nie Yan left the chat and looked at the other piece of equipment. His eyes widened; it was another fantastic item!

Leaper Ring (Dark Gold)

Description: Reduce the player's weight by 90%, allowing them to leap as far as 10 meters. Cannot be used in combat.  
Cooldown: 10 minutes

Restrictions: Can be equipped by any faction.

This was most certainly a rare and great item. Perhaps through the lens of a normal player it would not seem all that useful, but in Nie Yan's eyes it was superior even to a Sub Legendary.

## Chapter 254 – Trapping The Boss

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The abilities from both the Silk Spinner Ring and Crawler Ring had allowed Nie Yan to benefit tremendously. If not for these two items, completing Volume I: Glimpse of Darkness of the Book of Order would still be a wishful dream. And now, he had just obtained the Leaper Ring. Although he lacked a ring slot to equip it in, he could just keep it in his bag for the time being and take it out when needed.

With this Leaper Ring, the range of options at his disposal grew all the more varied, allowing him to tackle obstacles he wouldn't have been able to otherwise.

Now that Nie Yan had so many treasures on him, including the Sub Legendary Cavalry Crossbow, he felt confident enough to snag himself a full set of godly equipment! Of course, the 'godly' in this case was simply referring to Sub Legendary gear. As for a true Legendary set, that was temporarily beyond the scope of his ability.

It might be a good idea to put some Sub Legendaries up for display in the treasury as well. Any self-respecting guild should have a few amazing items that stand out above the rest.

Nie Yan searched around for a while longer but failed to find anything else, so he left the building and went to regroup with the expedition team.

Before long, Nie Yan found his way back to the others. They had

made good headway advancing deeper into the city. What left him pleasantly surprised was that they hadn't suffered a single casualty during his absence.

Assuming the role of commander once more, Nie Yan led the team to a public square large enough to fit tens of thousands of players let alone six hundred, where they saw an eight-meter tall golem roaming the center. Its bolted metal carapace was mottled with rust. Its left hand was a giant metal cudgel while its right was an enormous buzzsaw. Its lower half resembled a tank with giant treads on both sides, rumbling loudly as it moved about.

This terrifying mechanical behemoth resembled a ferocious beast baring its fangs.

It was one of the five Lords that spawned in Everlasting City, Goblin Eviscerator!

It was undoubtedly a powerful foe! Countless teams ended up wiping at its hands in the previous timeline. After being defeated, it would take three days to respawn. It was guaranteed to drop at least Dark Gold-grade equipment, with a 1/1000 chance for a Sub Legendary to appear.

"I'll go take a closer look," Nie Yan said before stealthily approaching the hulking Goblin Eviscerator which radiated a stifling pressure.

Nie Yan arrived behind the golem and activated Transcendent Insight.

Goblin Eviscerator (Lord): Level 40

Health: 100,000/100,000

The Goblin Eviscerator possessed several powerful abilities. The first was Machinery Evisceration, a three-hit attack that was guaranteed to crit on every hit. No matter how tanky a Fighter was, if a Lord landed three critical hits in a row, it was virtually a certainty they would die. The second was Dash Charge. Anyone hit by this ability would be sent flying away. Finally, there was Steamroll, an attack that dealt massive area-of-effect damage to every unit in a three-meter radius.

In the previous timeline, Nie Yan had joined up with others to hunt the Goblin Eviscerator. It wasn't until their third attempt that they didn't wipe, slaying the behemoth instead.

Back then, Nie Yan was with over 100 other players, all of whom were at least Level 40. They checked online guides on how to defeat the Goblin Eviscerator, while also attempting to put what they learned into practice. Only after wiping twice did they finally figure out the tricks to defeat it.

Although Nie Yan had 600 players at present, their levels were comparatively much lower. He wasn't sure if they could succeed.

「Bladelight, come with me. I need another Thief and a Priest



too!」Nie Yan said in the team chat.

Bladelight scanned over the players, hesitant on who to pick.

“I’ll go,” One Strike Vow volunteered herself, stepping out of the crowd.

“Me too.” Young Seven came forward as well.

「Painted Muslin, Moon Child, and Black Heaven, join the party as well, though you guys don’t need to follow. If we end up dying, come over and revive us,」Nie Yan added. This was a necessary precaution.

Bladelight, Young Seven, and One Strike Vow went over to Nie Yan’s side.

Nie Yan nodded in approval. He had full trust in the ability of these three players. He turned to Bladelight and said, “You don’t have to attack in this battle. Just block the Goblin Eviscerator’s way. Take note of your positioning, and keep your Guard Stance up at all times! Its frontal charge is fast, but it can’t change directions. As long as you stand in front of it like an immovable boulder, it won’t be able to get past you easily.”

Nie Yan ordered the rest of the team to hide far away to avoid any mishaps.

Nie Yan turned to One Strike Vow and said, “When Bladelight

engages the Goblin Eviscerator, listen to my commands. We're going to slowly lure it to the fountain garden at the center of the square."

"What do I do?" Young Seven asked.

"You keep Bladelight alive," Nie Yan replied. Young Seven had the easiest job out of the four of them.

Inside the fountain garden were several large sculptures which made excellent obstacles for limiting the Goblin Eviscerator's movements. If they were to try fighting it out in the open, it could easily break out of the Warrior encirclement with a Dash Charge or Steamroll. What awaited them then would surely be a massacre!

There was a special method to deal with the Goblin Eviscerator!

Nie Yan explained the process of luring the Goblin Eviscerator to Young Seven, Bladelight, and One Strike Vow. Although they understood in principle, they felt actually pulling this off would be incredibly difficult. They wouldn't necessarily succeed on the first try. It was very likely they were going to end up dying once or twice.

"Alright, let's start. Don't worry if we end up failing the first time," Nie Yan said, staring at the Goblin Eviscerator up ahead.

"I'm going up," Bladelight said. He raised his heavy shield and ran up to engage the Goblin Eviscerator. Nie Yan and One Strike

Vow didn't dally either, dashing towards the east and west side of the square respectively.

Bladelight appeared before the Goblin Eviscerator, prompting the golem to rev into action and charge at him.

He quickly activated Guard Stance, holding up his shield to face the oncoming attack.「Klang!」The Goblin Eviscerator heavily collided with him.

Bladelight instantly lost over 300 health. But his health bar soon recovered after a gentle radiance fell over him. It was Young Seven's Heal!

Bladelight quickly stabilized himself as he maintained Guard Stance. He firmly withstood the Goblin Eviscerator's blows. But during this whole time, he never attacked back.

In the distance, Nie Yan took out the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow. He took aim and fired「Whoosh whoosh whoosh!」Five bolts flew out in quick succession and struck the Goblin Eviscerator.

A string of damage values floated up above its head.

The Goblin Eviscerator's aggro immediately switched over to Nie Yan. It clumsily turned around before charging towards him at full speed. However, Bladelight appeared in front of it like a roadblock. 「Klang!」It collided heavily with his shield, treads still rotating rapidly. But he staunchly barred its way, digging his feet into the ground as he was slowly pushed back.

The Goblin Eviscerator gradually advanced, but it couldn't get past Bladelight.

On the other side of the square, One Strike Vow shot out arrow after arrow, attracting the Goblin Eviscerator's attention. It slowly changed directions yet again, then charged toward her.

Following Nie Yan's prior instructions, Bladelight continued to block the Goblin Eviscerator's path, only allowing it to press forward bit by bit.

Just like this, the Goblin Eviscerator was slowly led closer to the fountain garden at the center of the square.

If it were only Bladelight luring the Goblin Eviscerator, with all of its aggro focused on him, he would undoubtedly be turned into

mincemeat. However, with Nie Yan and One Strike Vow splitting the aggro, Bladelight didn't need to tank as many attacks.

Only now did Bladelight, Young Seven, and One Strike Vow comprehend the ingenuity of Nie Yan's plan.

After setting the cadence, the party grew extremely focused, not allowing the slightest mishap.

With Nie Yan and One Strike Vow controlling its movements, the Goblin Eviscerator was slowly led into the fountain garden.

"382.278.285! Go to that point with your Guard Stance up!" Nie Yan anxiously yelled.

Bladelight blanked for a moment, taking several steps back as he moved toward the coordinates Nie Yan called out. However, he was half-a-step too late. Before he could get his Guard Stance back up, he was sent flying by a Dash Charge.

The Goblin Eviscerator charged toward Nie Yan with its buzzsaw spinning menacingly.

Nie Yan turned tail, fleeing for his life.

However, the Goblin Eviscerator was simply too fast. With a sweep of its enormous buzzsaw, Nie Yan was struck in the back.

-723! It was an instant kill!

As Nie Yan's corpse collapsed to the ground, the Goblin Eviscerator switched targets to One Strike Vow, who died just as miserably. The next to follow was Young Seven. A moment later, Bladelight was cut down as well.

With all the enemies dead, the Goblin Eviscerator resumed a passive state.

After the Goblin Eviscerator roamed far enough away, Black Heaven, Ten Li Painted Muslin, and Moon Child ran over and started reviving everyone.

As rays of holy light descended on their corpses, Nie Yan and the others were revived.

Nie Yan picked up his equipment, then glanced at his experience bar. It had dropped by 30%. The experience penalty was pretty harsh.

The four convened in a vacant area near the edge of the public square.

Nie Yan gazed at Bladelight and asked, "So how was it? Did you get a feel of things?"

Bladelight replied in an apologetic tone, "My bad, I lapsed for a moment. I think I know what to do now."

Nie Yan nodded. In the previous timeline, each of the seven Fighters in his team had died five or six times before reaching this point. He could imagine the difficulty of repositioning himself on such short notice. Bladelight only had to die once to understand what he needed to do.

“The Goblin Eviscerator normally only attacks with the buzzsaw. All you have to do is guard against attacks coming from that side, and you’ll reduce the damage you take by over two-thirds. After we lead it into the fountain garden, just hold down that point I shouted out earlier, and the rest will be a piece of cake,” Nie Yan said. This advice came from the accumulated experiences of countless players in the previous timeline. It made the Goblin Eviscerator’s Machinery Evisceration and Dash Charge completely ineffective. In this way, they could defeat a Level 40 Lord without breaking a sweat!

## Chapter 255 – Divine Right Set

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The party sat down to recover. After their weakened states wore off, Nie Yan stood up and said, “Let’s give it another go.”

Nie Yan, Bladelight, and the others lured the Goblin Eviscerator back toward the sculptures in the fountain garden. With the experience of their previous attempt, their teamwork and coordination became a lot smoother.

They gradually led the Goblin Eviscerator into the center of the public square.

“Don’t rush, we’re almost there...” Nie Yan said, wiping the perspiration from his brow. This was a crucial moment. If the slightest mishap occurred, all their hard work would go to waste, and they would end up dying again.

The Goblin Eviscerator’s movements were greatly encumbered by the statues. With almost no room to maneuver, it activated Dash Charge in an attempt to escape. But Bladelight reacted instantly, rushing to the coordinates Nie Yan mentioned previously and hunkering down with Guard Stance.

「Klang!」The Goblin Eviscerator collided with the nearby statues. However, these statues which were cast from metal only trembled slightly, otherwise unfazed.

Bladelight repositioned himself behind the Goblin Eviscerator, slightly off to the right.



“Nirvana Flame, I found a better position!” Bladelight exclaimed in excitement. If he stayed in this position, the Goblin Eviscerator would be completely immobile. Its front was blocked by the statues, while its back was firmly blocked by Bladelight’s heavy shield. It couldn’t turn around to attack Bladelight, nor could it charge through the statues. It was reduced to nothing more than a stationary target dummy!

Although luck admittedly played a factor in getting the Goblin Eviscerator stuck, it was Bladelight’s keen awareness that played a decisive role. His position as a top three Fighter in the previous timeline wasn’t an empty title!

“Bring the rest of the team over,” Nie Yan ordered. With the Goblin Eviscerator trapped, there wasn’t even a need for healing. It would be fine to just order everyone to attack.

The players who were hiding far away came rushing over. When they saw how the Goblin Eviscerator was stuck, they all became slack-jawed. Fuck! You can even do it like that? A Level 40 Lord is going to die in such a tragic way?

“I want several Fighters to go up and assist Bladelight. Don’t let the Goblin Eviscerator break free!” Nie Yan instructed.

Yi Yan and several other Fighters rushed up, forming a human wall.

The Mages spread out across the square and started chanting.

Before long, spells streaked across the sky and rained down on the Goblin Eviscerator, causing sparks to fly everywhere.

Most of these Mages were only doing a little over 10 damage a hit to the Goblin Eviscerator. Even the strongest among them, Tang Yao, only dealt around 60 damage. The Ignore Level property from his Arcane Fairy proved to be a great boost to his damage.

Nevertheless, over 200 Mages were bombarding the Goblin Eviscerator with spells. It was experiencing death by a thousand cuts.

“God damn! The health regeneration on this bucket of bolts is too crazy!” Tang Yao exclaimed. Although they were doing a lot of damage, the Goblin Eviscerator’s health was falling at a snail’s pace. It took over 10 seconds just to shave away a sliver of its health!

“All Machine-type monsters with energy cores have passive regeneration!” Nie Yan raised his Cavalry Crossbow.「Whoosh whoosh whoosh!」Five bolts streaked across the sky, emitting a dazzling light, and struck the Goblin Eviscerator.

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“Holy shit! Such high damage!” Tang Yao exclaimed. Even he was hard-pressed to deal so much damage!

Tang Yao looked over to Nie Yan, only to see him carrying an enormous crossbow. It was exquisite with a sleek design, covered in all sorts of mystical runes. It resembled the siege crossbows mounted atop the city walls of Calore. Even with its visual effects concealed, it was extremely eye-catching.

When Nie Yan had previously shot at the Goblin Eviscerator, he actually wondered why his damage was so low. However, after seeing how little damage the Mages were dealing, he quickly realized he had erred.

The might of the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow was unquestioned!

The metal carapaces of Machine-type monsters substantially reduced the piercing power of arrows and bolts and ignored effects like bonus on-hit fire damage. Despite this, the Cavalry Crossbow still dealt an incredible amount of damage!

“Boss, what’s that crossbow in your hands? It’s really powerful!” Summer Bug asked. While he and the others Mages unleashed an unending stream of spells, they couldn’t help but notice that Nie Yan was dealing much more damage than them individually. This

was too shocking!

After all, a Thief wasn't some powerful ranged class!

With a simple glance, they could tell why. The crossbow in Nie Yan's hands definitely wasn't simple! This was their first time seeing one that large! That fierce! That domineering! How was he even able to carry it around?

Its design was extremely elaborate. The five bolts it shot out in quick succession emitted a chilling light.

Penta Bolt Shot!

None of them had ever seen a crossbow with the Penta Bolt Shot property. Those with just the Triple-shot property were already considered extraordinary!

The five bolts let out a continuous hum as they flew through the air, their pointed ends emitting a piercing light.「Ding ding ding!」 They struck the Goblin Eviscerator practically at the same time. Some of them even pierced through its thick metal carapace.

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One of the bolts critted for three times the normal damage!

What a terrifying crossbow! Its valiant properties made people exclaim in admiration!

A whole bunch of team members forgot what they were doing as they looked over at Nie Yan in awe. How could he not attract everyone's attention after something like that?

“Boss, what kind of crossbow is that?”

Since everyone was asking about his crossbow, Nie Yan could no longer keep silent. “It's the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow.”

Everyone was shocked. The names of every piece of equipment were determined from a finite list. Items such as the Staff of Divine Right, Shattered Sword, Valor Shield, and so on were generally all Dark Gold-grade or lower. But items whose names were related to an NPC, such as the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow or Grett's Sovereign Staff, were exclusively Sub Legendary or even Legendary-grade. The more prominent an NPC was in the annals of Conviction, the more powerful the equipment they left behind.

Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow, as soon as everyone heard the name, they knew it was at least Sub Legendary-grade.

At present, players found it extremely difficult to obtain Dark Gold-grade equipment. A single piece would bankrupt the vast majority of players. As for Sub Legendary-grade equipment, who knew how many there were in the entire Viridian Empire? They hadn't even shown up on the official forums yet. This was telling of how rare they were.

To everyone's surprise, Nie Yan had actually gotten his hands on a Sub Legendary item. However, after recalling the Legendary-grade Grimmar Soul Staff sitting high atop a pedestal in the guild treasury, they felt this was easier to accept. Obtaining two pieces of Godly equipment, their guild leader was simply too amazing!

"Boss, share the properties of the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow with us!" Undying Scoundrel exclaimed, no longer able to hold back his curiosity.

"Yeah! Let us see it!" Numerous people in the crowd echoed Undying Scoundrel's request. They really wanted to find out just what sort of properties this crossbow had.

There was no harm in publicizing the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow. At the behest of the crowd, Nie Yan shared its properties in the chat, whereupon everyone let out sighs of admiration.

"Dang! What an amazing crossbow!"

307–327 Attack, 30% Piercing Damage, 30% chance to deal 3x Critical Damage, +100 Fire Damage, and Penta Bolt Shot, these sorts of properties on a crossbow practically broke the game! It fully deserved to be called a Sub Legendary-grade item.

30% Piercing Damage meant the Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow could effectively ignore the vast majority of armour types that weren't heavy armour! The other properties were arguably even more powerful.

“Boss, you have 800 Strength?” Edgeless, who was currently providing support to Bladelight, couldn't help but ask in shock. Even as a Berserker, he only had 370 Strength!

Only now did everyone notice the Strength required to equip the crossbow. This was a staggeringly high bar to meet!

“I have a special method that lets me equip this crossbow,” Nie Yan replied. Even though Volume 1: Glimpse of Darkness was already bound to him, there was no need to reveal it if he didn't have to.

In the minds of everyone, the so-called ‘special method’ was definitely something that lowered the requirements of equipment. Such items were actually relatively common if you looked hard enough. For example, Bladelight's Level 40 Everlasting Silver Set could be equipped at Level 30.

No one inquired any further. It wasn't good to force Nie Yan to

reveal everything. There would be disastrous consequences if an enemy somehow got their hands on such information. Nevertheless, his Dullahan Cavalry Crossbow really did give everyone a big shock.

Bladelight and the other Warriors were firmly blocking the Goblin Eviscerator. No matter how it struggled, it was unable to break free. It was irrevocably stuck even after becoming enraged. The Mages continued shelling it with magic. Two minutes later, its health finally fell to zero, and it collapsed to the ground.

A wave of players shined with a brilliant light. The Goblin Eviscerator gave a generous amount of experience. More than half of the expedition team members levelled up. Nie Yan checked his experience bar. It was now 70% of the way filled. This was quite considerable.

Bladelight searched through the pile of scrap metal. Surprisingly, he found five pieces of equipment, several gems, and one Energy Key Fragment.

The Goblin Eviscerator had dropped a ton of loot. Their luck was pretty good!

“What dropped?” Nie Yan asked.

Some of the team members helped appraise the items.

“Staff of Divine Right, Radiant Sword, Robes of Divine Right,



Boots of Divine Right, and Everlasting Chestplate (Dark Gold)!”

They shared the properties of all the equipment in chat. Because they were drops from a Lord-class monster, all of them were Dark Gold-grade!

Three pieces of the Divine Right Set dropped. If the expedition team killed all five Lords, they might be able to complete the full set. It was one of the best Level 40 Holy Priest sets out there.

“Radiant Sword for 20,000 merit points. Do any of the Paladins want it?” Nie Yan asked.

“I’ll take it. I have enough,” Tuoba Time said. The properties of this Dark Gold-grade sword were outstanding. Even he was moved.

Nie Yan handed over the Radiant Sword to Tuoba Time, then turned to Young Seven, Black Heaven, Painted Muslin, and Moon Child and asked, “Which one of you wants the Divine Right Set?”

“I’ll concede it to the ladies,” Young Seven said in a very gentleman-like tone. The Divine Right Set was farmable in Everlasting City, so they could just grind out another one in the future if necessary.

## Chapter 256 – Plot

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“I don’t have enough points.” Moon Child shook her head. It was still a bit too early to be thinking about Level 40 equipment. After all, she wasn’t even Level 30 yet, and Priests were generally much slower at levelling up compared to other classes.

“How about we leave it in the treasury for now? It can go to whoever gets to Level 40 first,” Ten Li Painted Muslin suggested.

Only now did Nie Yan get a chance to examine this recent recruit. She wore light blue Priest robes, and had a graceful and gentle bearing. In terms of appearance, she didn’t lose out in the slightest to beauties like Yao Yao, Yu Lan, and Moon Child.

“I suppose we’ll keep it in the treasury then. If any of you want it, just let me know.” Nie Yan nodded. Top quality Dark Gold-grade equipment such as the Divine Right Set definitely couldn’t be treated like regular items in the treasury. They were obtained through the combined efforts of the expedition team members who braved all sorts of dangers with potentially disastrous outcomes, after all. It would be a great loss if an enemy spy managed to smuggle one out of the guild, so such equipment would be restricted to contracted elites only.

In the previous timeline, a Lord dropping two pieces of Dark Gold-grade equipment was very rare. If not a single piece of equipment dropped, then you could only blame your bad luck. However, as the first group to explore this map, Nie Yan’s expedition team got to reap greater rewards. They had really lucked out, obtaining five pieces of Dark Gold-grade equipment

from a single Lord!

Nie Yan led the group deeper into Everlasting City, clearing away all Mechanical and Plasma Core Golems in their path. Besides six members dying in combat, no other mishaps worth mentioning occurred. Two were revived by the Priests, while the remaining few didn't get to enjoy such luxury. But on the whole, everything was progressing pretty smoothly.

During this time, they managed to complete the Everlasting Gold Set. Bladelight put on the new set, improving his stats significantly, then handed down his old set to Yi Yan. They also obtained another Everlasting Silver Set, which Nie Yan planned to hand over to Sleepy Fox as per their previous agreement.

They were having a tremendous harvest on this trip in Everlasting City, obtaining all sorts of high-quality equipment. Nie Yan had rewarded everyone with at least 500 merit points each so far. Some even earned up to a thousand. The average level of the team also increased by one since setting foot in the map.

Nie Yan quickly set about making his preparations for taking on the next Lord—the Goblin Flame Manipulator, a Machine-type monster that could employ Fire Magic. Its combat power was extremely formidable. However, with the Everlasting Gold Set, Bladelight was ready to take on the challenge.

There was also a unique way of defeating the Goblin Flame Manipulator. Its damage was extremely high, and there was a chance the whole expedition team would be wiped out if they were hit by one of its area-of-effect spells. When it started casting large-

scale magic, it was imperative that the players got out of its range in time. As for predicting when it was going to cast an area-of-effect spell, Nie Yan had a special method. It was something which the players on the forums of the previous timeline had come up with. On top of this, he also had some prior experiences with this boss, since he had taken part in expeditions to defeat it before.

The team was still not perfectly in sync, so they couldn't perform group dodges very quickly yet. They wiped twice before finishing off the Goblin Flame Manipulator on their third attempt. It dropped three pieces of Dark Gold-grade equipment.

Greatly relieved, everyone sat down scattered across the square and began to heal up from the fight.

"Compared to the Goblin Eviscerator, this one was way too hard!" Bladelight wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead. Killing the Goblin Flame Manipulator had barely given them enough experience to make up for the losses they sustained after wiping twice.

"The next few will be much easier," Nie Yan assured. The Goblin Flame Manipulator was a special case, since there were very few bosses with the ability to cast area-of-effect spells at long range. It was just too hard to deal with!

"Thank God." Bladelight sighed with relief. It would be extremely depressing if they had to die twice every time they faced off against a Lord-class monster.

“It’s a pity. Aside from a few pieces of Dark Gold-grade equipment, nothing else good dropped,” Undying Scoundrel said dejectedly.

“You’ve really been spoiled, huh? Just look at Victorious Return and Holy Empire. Do you think those guys can get their hands on Level 40 Dark Gold-grade equipment?” Bladelight rebuked. Without Nie Yan’s strategies there would be no way to defeat these bosses. No matter how large of a force arrived, the end result would still be a complete wipe, every time.

“The next Lord we’re going after is the Goblin Disintegrator. There’s a good chance it’ll drop an advanced magic skill book, so everybody liven up!” Nie Yan announced.

After resting back up to full health, the team stood up and began to reorganize themselves.

Their clearing speed was pretty fast. At their current pace, Nie Yan estimated they could be out of Everlasting City before the start of Holy Empire’s stronghold battle with Radiant Sacred Flame. If their luck wasn’t too bad, they might even be able to complete the Everlasting Dark Gold Set. Like this, Bladelight’s combat power would be upgraded by another step.

If Bladelight were to go into the stronghold battle wearing that kind of equipment, he would be able to effortlessly crush ordinary players like bugs. He would have an enormous influence on the final outcome.

One of the reasons Nie Yan chose this place for Asskickers United's first guild activity was to improve the quality of Bladelight's gear. This goal could be considered accomplished when they got him the Everlasting Gold Set. However, if they could fit him with the Everlasting Dark Gold Set, it would be even better! Thus far, they had gathered three pieces of the set—gauntlets, chest plate, and leg armour—so they were a long shot from completing the full set. They might even have to revisit this place in three days for a second run.

While Asskickers United was rushing to clear Everlasting City, several battles broke out between Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame. This time, Radiant Sacred was really under a lot of pressure. They were initially confident in their success thanks to the support of Victorious Return. However, a certain incident caught them completely off-guard. Almost all the Victorious Return elites slated to appear were thrown in the Calore jail cellars! Suddenly having the rug pulled out from under them, on the eve of the battle no less! They were thrown into utter panic and disarray.

Radiant Sacred Flame began to ambush Holy Empire's elites anywhere they could, trying to weaken them before the battle. Additionally, they mobilized forces from other cities to reinforce their lineup. Although it pained them to pay 1 gold per player for the transfers, they had no choice but to do so.

Holy Empire lost quite a few elites to Radiant Sacred Flame's attacks, but once reports reached the higher-ups, they retaliated in full force. Since neither side was willing to yield, another large battle ensued between the two guilds.

Aside from their attacks on Holy Empire, Radiant Sacred Flame also sent out forces to various popular levelling spots to search for traces of Asskickers United's elites. However, what left them dejected was that they found no traces of their target, almost as if they had vanished into thin air. Radiant Sacred Flame's scouts were extremely confused. Was Asskickers United not going to do any last-minute levelling? Little did they know that Nie Yan's group was currently clearing a Level 40 map!

Victorious Return also wanted to avenge themselves, so they too sought out Asskickers United players to slaughter. With their involvement, the four major guilds once more became embroiled in chaotic warfare. The war continued to exponentially expand in scope. More and more guilds were dragged into the mess as both sides called for allies and attacked their enemies.

Not long after the fighting erupted, Sleepy Fox and Nie Yan jointly carried out a devious plot. They had 25 players from both their guilds invite 15 relatively famous Sapphire Shrine players to go out levelling together. Afterwards, Asskickers United secretly leaked this group's location to Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. The two guilds quickly surrounded them with hundreds of assailants. The result was obvious: all 40 players were promptly sent to their graves.

Where Asskickers United and Holy Empire began mobilizing people to hunt down the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame, Sapphire Shrine stayed silent. The people from Holy Empire and Asskickers United mocked the players from Sapphire Shrine for being gutless cowards. Although the 15 Sapphire Shrine players who died had been quelled by Fa Lan, they really could endure no longer. They each led over a hundred players to massacre the players of

## Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Before long, Sapphire Shrine was also pulled into the fray. As the casualties on both sides increased, the players from Sapphire Shrine grew enraged. Although they had been neutral all this time, Victorious Return's rampant nature had long since left them dissatisfied. Those 15 players dying was simply the straw that broke the camel's back. Fa Lan could no longer hold his people back. If he insisted on forcing them to stay their hand, it could very well culminate into a mass exodus.

Fa Lan looked closely at the entire affair, noticing that there was something fishy about the whole ordeal. It was really odd, how Asskickers United and Holy Empire had suddenly invited his players to level together. What's more, the players that had been invited were all pretty popular within the guild. Less than an hour after they began, they were completely surrounded by Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. After the party with the 15 players from Sapphire Shrine were killed, Asskickers United and Holy Empire took the lead in a furious vengeance. As they fought, they also barraged Sapphire Shrine with unceasing taunts about their cowardice in quietly swallowing this insult. There were even a bunch of players within the guild who fanned the flames and clamored for action. Each of the fallen 15 were popular enough to have a sizeable following within the guild, so how could they swallow this insult? They brought their friends to avenge themselves, thoroughly entrenching Sapphire Shrine's involvement in the chaos.

By the end, the people under Fa Lan had mobilized without his approval. He had lost control of them, so he could only turn a blind eye. With no choice but to accept this fact, he endlessly cursed in



his heart. This time, he had fallen for Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox's plot. These two sly bastards were far too despicable!

With the forces of Sapphire Shrine fighting them so fiercely, how could Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame not believe they had joined sides with Holy Empire and Asskickers United? There was no way to step out of these muddy waters. Sapphire Shrine was effectively forced aboard the same ship as Holy Empire and Asskickers United. If those two collapsed later on, Sapphire Shrine would be forced down with them.

Fa Lan secretly cursed Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox to hell and back again, but he could only reluctantly accept this fact.

From today onwards, how could Sapphire Shrine still remain neutral? They could only grit their teeth and join Asskickers United and Holy Empire's alliance.

# Chapter 257 – Xie Yao

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Everything progressed swimmingly under Nie Yan and Sleepy Fox's careful supervision.

Fa Lan yielded in the end, allowing his guild members to join the conflict. The players of Sapphire Shrine fought Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame with extreme ferocity. Considering they were fighting a force which numbered over 5,000, their losses were of course substantial.

Fa Lan was powerless to stop the enmity that had sparked between Sapphire Shrine and both Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame

Sleepy Fox brought news of this development to Nie Yan the instant it occurred, laughing heartily in the voice chat.「That old dog Fa Lan tried hard but couldn't escape boarding our pirate ship in the end! Let's see if he can still remain so laid-back like before!」

Nie Yan was satisfied as well. With Sapphire Shrine being forced to ally with them, they had the manpower to rival Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

The overall balance of power now vastly differed from the previous timeline. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were no longer untouchable superpowers.

「Don't celebrate too early. We'll have to iron out the details of our alliance with Fa Lan first,」Nie Yan said.

「When the duck is thoroughly cooked, is there a need to worry about it flying away? I'll get him to send some elites to join the stronghold battle,」Sleepy Fox chuckled sinisterly. If Fa Lan were to join, victory was virtually assured; Radiant Sacred Flame would crumple beneath the three-pronged assault of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine.

「Go ahead.」Nie Yan was slightly distracted when his voice chat lit up with a call from Guo Huai.「Let's talk later.」

「No problem.」Sleepy Fox started up his own call with Fa Lan.

「How are the losses?」Nie Yan asked after picking up. He was wondering how Asskickers United was doing, since they were in an ongoing battle with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

「Not too bad, though things could be better. We've had about 10,000 casualties on our side, but the enemy has suffered three times as much. Our forces are quite fierce. We've looted so much equipment that our treasury is almost full!」Guo Huai replied. They maintained a constant 3:1 kill-death ratio against the enemy. All that could be said was that the players of the guild were simply too strong!

「Good! When you dole out the merit points, give everyone a little extra!」Nie Yan nodded in approval. The members of Asskickers United were the creme of the crop among the player base. Coupled with the boost in morale from their recent successes, this was the least he expected.

「One other thing. Cao Xu, the chairman of Century Financial Group, contacted me. He said he wishes to purchase shares in Asskickers United, and if we agreed, the Century Financial Group was willing to let us set a price we would be satisfied with. How should I respond?」Guo Huai asked. It would be a huge help to the guild's development if they received an investment from such a large financial group.

Nie Yan's expression darkened. In the previous timeline, Century Financial Group employed this exact method to take out any potential rivals, controlling guild after guild through their massive capital. And now, they wanted to get their grubby hands on everything that he had built up.

「Asskickers United will not sell any shares to the Century Financial Group, under any circumstances. Reject their offer!」Nie Yan spoke in a grave tone.

「Understood.」Guo Huai nodded. He was slightly puzzled by the traces of anger he detected in Nie Yan's voice. Why did he sound so emotional when I mentioned Century Financial Group? Is there some history between them?

「Pay close attention to the movements of Century Financial Group from now on! Take note of which guilds have been bought by them!」Nie Yan instructed. He had no choice but to prepare some countermeasures now that Cao Xu had set his eyes on Asskickers United.

「Alright. Don't worry, you can leave this to me,」Guo Huai replied.「On a final note, about that thing you asked me last time... Well, I've gathered some information on Xie Yao.」

Nie Yan's heart skipped a beat.「Tell me.」

「You know, she's got quite the background. Have you heard of the name, Xie Pei?」

「Xie Pei... the business tycoon, the chairman of the Zheng Rong Financial Group?」Nie Yan replied after blanking for a moment.

「Yeah. Xie Pei is Xie Yao's uncle, and her mother is the daughter of the Leaping Dragon Financial Group's chairman. That's definitely quite the lineup. It's also been reported that on the day she was born, she was given 12% and 28% of each respective company's shares, bringing her net worth to nearly ¥10,000,000,000. This young lady was born with a diamond spoon. That said, her family doesn't seem to be living very extravagantly. Her parents don't keep a high-profile, rarely interacting with the administrative staff of their companies. They're currently living in a villa at Huahai,」Guo Huai informed. He had no idea what he was getting into when he first agreed to Nie Yan's request. As soon as he started his investigation, he nearly shit his pants in fright. Such a deep background even left someone like him speechless.

Nie Yao was stunned as well. Zheng Rong and Leaping Dragon were top financial groups in the country, only second to Cao Xu's Century Financial Group. Why didn't he hear anyone mention Xie Yao's background in his past life?

Most of Nie Yan's classmates knew Xie Yao was from a wealthy family. But he doubted they knew to what degree. Even during its peak, his father's company was still easily dwarfed by the Zheng Rong and Leaping Dragon financial groups—this was the sheer size of these two titans!

「I've heard Xie Yao's parents donated all their shares to charitable organizations, save a portion for Xie Yao herself. They don't particularly care who their daughter marries so long as she likes him. So cheer up! You still have a shot!」Guo Huai comforted. It was truly impressive for Xie Yao's parents to give up so much wealth.

Although Xie Yao's background shocked him, Nie Yan wasn't deterred. True love knew no boundaries, definitely not monetary one. Even after two lifetimes, Xie Yao's silhouette still remained deeply engraved into his heart.

Memories of the previous timeline floated in Nie Yan's mind. Regardless of Xie Yao's background, he knew one thing. He wouldn't ever let her go again.

「Don't sell yourself short! I have faith in you!」Guo Huai reassured. If this brother of his wasn't good enough for Xie Yao, who was?

Nie Yan's mood couldn't help but perk up at Guo Huai's encouragement.「I'll be cheering you on too.」Of course, he was referring to their former class president.

「Hey? Can you not always bring up this embarrassing thing?」  
Guo Huai laughed.

The two chattered on for a while longer before hanging up, whereupon Nie Yan refocused his attention on the expedition.

While Nie Yan was directing everyone, Yao Yao walked up to him.

“Nirvana Flame, I have a Priest quest I’m stuck on half-way. After we finish the stronghold battle, can you help me?” Yao Yao asked, her bright eyes sparkling with anticipation—a pair of glittering diamonds with a captivating tint.

Nie Yan slightly averted his gaze. “What quest?”

“Karsi’s Blessing. The reward is a Templar Magic skill book,” Yao Yao replied.

“You received the Karsi’s Blessing quest?” Nie Yan asked in shock. In truth, he really didn’t have the heart to refuse Yao Yao. Besides, with what he knew, helping her complete the quest would be a simple effort. He nodded. “Sure, just remind me later.”

## Chapter 258 – Goblin Cannoneer

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Karsi was a powerful Holy Mage who led the Templar Crusaders. Nie Yan never thought Yao Yao would receive his quest, let alone get through half of it all by herself. It was the first of a series of quests related to the Holy Shrine, each exponentially more difficult than the last. The reward for completing the first quest was a Rank 1 Templar Magic skill book, while the reward for completing the fifth and final quest was a Legendary set. However, even in the previous timeline, the furthest anyone progressed was the third quest. So in the eyes of the players, obtaining this set was nothing more than a pipe dream.

Karsi's Blessing had harsh requirements which very few could meet.

Asskickers United sorely lacked players who could cast advanced magic. It didn't help that between the recent guild war, expedition, and stronghold battle, none of the members had any time to acquire them. Add this to the fact that this process was rather rigorous, and the only few in the guild that knew advanced magic were the likes of Undying Scoundrel and Black Heaven.

If Nie Yan helped Yao Yao complete the quest, it was tantamount to Asskickers United having another player who could cast advanced magic.

As Nie Yan's friendship with Yao Yao gradually deepened, he couldn't help but remember the erotic night they spent together in that secret chamber beneath Fenarte City. His mind was bewitched as those seductive scenes flashed before him. Although Yao Yao



was not as voluptuous as Yu Lan, her flawless and elegant beauty was the forbidden fruit that filled his heart with an unquenchable ardor. Her figure was exquisite—not a hint of excess fat on her body; a pair of soft, perfectly round mounds; and jade-white skin without the slightest blemish.

Nie Yan's heart raced in his chest. When he recalled Yao Yao was still untainted at that time, he felt even more guilt about pushing her away in this life. But there was nothing else he could do, for he knew himself all too well; if he were to spend time together with her, temptation would overcome him.

Nie Yan bitterly smiled. No matter how strong-willed a person was, some desires couldn't be outrun. He was only a man, after all. Knowing he could never get rid of the carnal urges buried deep inside his heart, he chose to distance himself from Yao Yao.

During the darkest moments in Nie Yan's past life, it was Yao Yao's tenderness that pulled him out of that deep quagmire of gray. With her asking him for help, how could he be so heartless as to refuse?

Nie Yan felt very conflicted deep inside. He truly didn't wish to hurt Yao Yao.

Seeing Nie Yan's distant expression, Xie Yao's heart welled up with a sense of loss. She felt a deep sense of sadness. She could tell he was only helping her out of a sense of obligation.

Staring at the outline of Nie Yan's cheeks, Xie Yao also sunk into

deep thought. Just what kind of person was Nie Yan? He was at times low-key, at others reserved, and still others fearless. He dealt with most matters calmly. But when the members of Asskickers United were killed, he would explode with rage as well, calling for the slaughter of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. What left the deepest impression on people, though, was when he killed Hei Zhuo under the eyes of almost a thousand enemies. His icy-cold gaze and arrogant smile shook the hearts of all players.

From a sense of familiarity in the beginning to deep admiration later on, Xie Yao was always paying attention to the things happening around Nie Yan. She wanted to know everything about him, partially from her delight at his success but also because she wanted to find out why he was so distant with her.

“Nirvana Flame, since you’ve agreed, you better not go back on it.” Yao Yao revealed a brilliant smile akin to warm sunshine on a cold winter’s day.

Yao Yao wore pure white Mage robes with her hair tied in a ponytail. Her charming appearance dazed all the surrounding players for a while.

“Mhmm, I won’t.” Nie Yan nodded. Helping Yao Yao out with this quest counted as repaying the kindness from his past life. It didn’t violate any of his principles. Besides, the happiness on her face was heart-warming.

Every minute, fewer golems roamed the streets of Everlasting City. After defeating four Lords in a row, all that remained was the final Lord, the Goblin Cannoneer. It was the strongest boss in

Everlasting City. Even when the player base averaged Level 40 in the previous timeline, very few people were able to beat it.

The heart of Everlasting City was a wide open space enveloped by a curtain of light with a towering spire at the very center. At the top of this lofty structure hovered an enormous spherical crystal which emitted a faint glow. It was this crystal that powered Everlasting City.

An eight-meter-tall golem clad in a gold metal carapace roamed around at the base of the spire. What stood out the most was the cannon that sat on top of its shoulder. It was a Magic Cannon, a weapon that rarely saw use outside of siege warfare. Thankfully this one was a smaller model. Were it full-sized like those seen on top of city walls, Nie Yan’s group would have no hope of surviving.

The Goblin Cannoneer radiated a dazzling golden radiance. It was a metallic giant. Every step it took shook the ground.

Nie Yan cautiously approached the Goblin Cannoneer after entering stealth. Taking cover behind a nearby bunker, he got within three meters of it and activated Transcendent Insight.

Goblin Cannoneer (Lord): Level 40  
Health: 200,000/200,000

Aside from being the strongest, the loot the Goblin Cannoneer dropped was also the best among the five Lords. In the previous timeline, someone reportedly obtained the Sub Legendary-grade

Solas Battle Armour after defeating it. Of course, this was dogshit luck. Although these Lords had a chance of dropping a piece of Sub Legendary-grade equipment, the drop rate was extremely low. Most players would already be beyond themselves if a Legendary-grade item fragment appeared.

The mini Magic Cannon mounted on the Goblin Cannoneer's shoulder couldn't launch projectiles very far. It shot out cannonballs which rolled along the ground, eventually exploding and dealing devastating area-of-effect damage. Squishier classes like Mages would be blasted to smithereens if hit. Its most powerful ability was firing three cannonballs in quick succession, dealing massive wide-scale damage. It was terrifying. Countless teams were wiped out by this skill in the previous timeline.

The Goblin Cannoneer's eyes suddenly started glowing red. It let out a low-pitch steaming whistle and aimed the cannon on its shoulder in a certain direction. A scorching-hot iron ball shot out of the cannon and landed on the ground with a thud, then gradually picked up speed as it rolled toward Nie Yan.

The cannon ball was red-hot, as if it had just come out of a furnace!

“Not good!” Nie Yan cried out in alarm. He activated Shadow Waltz and quickly retreated.

「Boom!」 The cannonball exploded after arriving at Nie Yan's previous position. Flames surged up into sky as shrapnel flew everywhere.

Although they were powerful, these cannonballs had a long detonation time. Coupled with the fact that Nie Yan was fast, he escaped the blast-radius without so much as a scratch. The Goblin Cannoneer lumbered over to the bunker. Not finding any trace of an enemy, it resumed a passive state.

Nie Yan returned to the expedition team.

“My god! That Lord is way too scary! Boss, how are we supposed to fight that thing?” Undying Scoundrel asked. Seeing the power of the cannonball’s explosion, he shuddered in fear.

“The only Fighters in our group who can tank its attacks are Bladelight and Yi Yan. I’m not so sure about the others,” Nie Yan said. Due to the Goblin Cannoneer’s attacks being area-of-effect, everyone within the explosion radius would receive damage. The Mages in the backline definitely wouldn’t survive such a blast. However, the trick to defeating this boss lay in the fact it could only fire its cannon once every ten seconds, and the cannonballs it shot out didn’t explode on collision.

As such, Nie Yan only needed to predict where the Goblin Cannoneer was going to attack and warn the Mages to get out of the way in advance. If everything worked out smoothly, they would eventually defeat the boss.

However, even though this sounded easy in theory, the team would have to make several attempts to finally defeat the Goblin Cannoneer. Needless to say, the prospect of wiping so many times

was extremely depressing. If they didn't succeed after the third try, they were better off calling it a day. After wiping, it would take about an hour to run back to their corpses. This meant it would take at least three hours to defeat the boss.

“Boss, do you have a special way to beat the Goblin Cannoneer, like you did with the Goblin Eviscerator?” Summer Bug asked. Their battle with the Goblin Eviscerator was extremely pleasant. They had practically suffered no casualties.

Nie Yan's eyes lit up, realizing he was adhering too rigidly to the standards of the previous timeline. Why couldn't he just think up a completely new method to defeat the Goblin Cannoneer?

Nie Yan scanned the surroundings, noticing six buildings to the left of him. They were at least a dozen meters tall, and were all constructed out of thick steel. They were extremely sturdy. There were pipes all over the sides and top of the buildings, with plenty of footholds for players to stand. He had a fantastical idea. Since there were so many buildings in the vicinity, why not take advantage of them?

By lending out his Crawler Ring and Silk Spinner Ring, Nie Yan could get all the Mages atop these buildings where they wouldn't have to worry about getting blasted by the Goblin Cannoneer's cannonballs.

As for the Fighters, they could simply attract the Goblin Cannoneer's aggro.

Like this, they could easily defeat the Goblin Cannoneer!

Moreover, the possibility of everyone wiping was nullified by the fact the Goblin Cannoneer's cannonballs couldn't affect any targets so high up.

"Boss, what are you doing?" All the guild members were staring at Nie Yan in bewilderment. Why was he constantly staring at the surrounding buildings?

"Sparrow Hawk, get over here!" Nie Yan said. Tang Yao had some experience with this tactic, so he should know what to do.

"What's up?" Tang Yao asked.

Nie Yan handed over the Crawler Ring to Tang Yao and said, "Climb up on top of that building, then throw the Crawler Ring back down!"

Tang Yao's mind trembled. He realized what Nie Yan was planning and said in an excited tone, "Damn! Why didn't I think of that? If we do it this way, we won't ever wipe!"

The crowd was baffled, not understanding the exchange between Nie Yan and Tang Yao.

Tang Yao ran over to the side of a nearby building. He equipped the Crawler Ring, activated its ability, and started crawling up the wall like a spider. He finally stopped after reaching a spot five

meters high with a good vantage point.

All the players widened their eyes in shock. Even this was possible!?

Tang Yao threw the Crawler Ring back down. Nie Yan nimbly caught it in his hand, then turned to the crowd and shouted, “Next!”



# Chapter 259 – Darkbright Leather Armour Of Solga

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Nie Yan's body was a treasure trove, brimming with all kinds of wonderful items. The Crawler Ring would absolutely fetch a sky-high price if listed up for auction. As a matter of fact, it was something that couldn't be bought even if the player had the gold. The crowd couldn't help but wonder how he got his hands on such a trinket.

It was difficult to determine how useful this sort of item was, an irreplaceable tool to some but dead weight in the hands of others.

The players scaled the buildings one after another until all six were jam-packed, forming a peculiar sight.

With this, the area between them turned into the focal point.

Only Nie Yan, Bladelight, and Yi Yan stuck to the ground. The rest of the Warriors retreated off in the distance.

Nie Yan turned to Bladelight and Yi Yan after reequipping the Crawler Ring. "I'll go draw the Goblin Hunter's aggro."

"Alright, be careful," Bladelight cautioned. This was a Level 40 Lord, after all. It wouldn't be easy to lure the Goblin Hunter out of its spawn, all the way to the center of the six buildings.

Nie Yan stealthily approached until he was within some 30 meters of the Goblin Hunter, whereupon he took aim with his Cavalry Crossbow.

「Whoosh whoosh whoosh!」Five bolts flew out toward the Goblin Hunter.

-24

-21

-22

-21

-23

After being struck, the Goblin Hunter fired out a red-hot iron ball that quickly picked up speed as it rolled toward the assailant.

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz and dodged to the left.

The cannonball detonated with a loud explosion, spewing out flames into the sky and sending shrapnel flying everywhere.

Even though Nie Yan hid himself in stealth which was further amplified by the cloud of smoke from the explosion, the Goblin Hunter quickly located him and gave chase.

Every step the Goblin Hunter took shook the ground heavily.

Another cannonball was fired out.

Nie Yan ducked to the side, only to notice the cannonball still on his heels.

It was homing in on him!

Seeing the cannonball was about to explode, Nie Yan shot out a web line from his Silk Spinner Ring which stuck to the wall of a nearby building and swung away.

「Boom!」Not a second later, Nie Yan felt a sweltering shock wave ruthlessly slam his back as a piece of shrapnel brushed past his arm.

A frighteningly high damage value floated up above Nie Yan's head. Luckily he wasn't at the center of the blast radius; otherwise, he wouldn't have been left with a complete corpse!

Nie Yan let go of the web line and made a graceful landing, whereupon he bolted toward the area at the center of the six buildings with the Goblin Hunter in hot pursuit.

“That was a close call!”

“The boss almost died there!”

“What kind of skill is that? Since when could Thieves shoot out

webs?”

“That’s obviously his secret, of course! Amazing! He even dodged an attack like that!”

The players were able to get a clear view of Nie Yan being chased by the Goblin Hunter from atop the buildings. It was nerve wracking, like a good thriller. There were many times where they thought he was toast, only to see him somehow survive by the skin of his teeth.

It was an exciting game of cat and mouse. No matter the danger, Nie Yan always found his way to safety.

Atop of one the buildings, Xie Yao felt like her heart was going to beat out of her chest. She couldn’t help but break out into a cold sweat whenever the Goblin Hunter closed in on Nie Yan. But he would deftly evade its attacks every single time. His speed was unmatched, his silhouette resembling a cheetah sprinting through the savannah.

Seeing Nie Yan was in no real danger, Xie Yao calmed down. No longer hers to control, her mood was subconsciously linked to his wellbeing.

Nie Yan finally arrived at the designated location. Letting out a deep roar, Bladelight charged forward and struck the Goblin Hunter with a Shield Bash.

「Klang!」The Goblin Hunter was knocked back a step by the impact.

Drawing only partial aggro, Bladelight activated Taunt.

The Goblin Hunter finally focused all its attention on Bladelight. 「Klang!」It swung a fist at Bladelight's shield, sending him staggering several steps back.

Bladelight charged back up after steadying himself.

“Everyone, attack! Give it your all!” Nie Yan shouted at the top of his lungs. Even if these players attracted the aggro of the Goblin Hunter, there was nothing it could do to them!

The Mages started casting their spells.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」They bombarded the Goblin Hunter's body. A long string of damage values floated up above its head.

None of the Mages held back in the slightest. It wasn't every day they could completely let loose like this without fear of suffering retaliation. They unleashed every high-damage single-target spell at their disposal.

Tang Yao was especially thrilled. Under normal circumstances, he would force himself to hold back out of fear that he would be the sole reason for the team wiping. But this time, he could go all out!

Magic rained down from the sky as the Goblin Hunter furiously fired out cannonballs.「Boom! Boom! Boom!」Every explosion sent Bladelight recoiling back.

Every cannonball that hit Bladelight took away almost 70% of his health. Fortunately, the Goblin Hunter's attack speed was rather slow, and the intervals between them were long. The Priests had ample time to cast Heal.

A curtain of light descended on Bladelight, restoring his health directly back to full.

Shield Bash!

Bladelight charged back up and slammed his shield against the Goblin Hunter.

The Goblin Hunter couldn't attack Tang Yao, Undying Scoundrel, and the other Mages, so it could only vent out its anger on Bladelight.

“All Warriors, block off the Goblin Hunter's path of retreat!” Nie Yan ordered. All their efforts would go to waste if the Lord lost aggro and returned to its spawn.

The Goblin Hunter's health was quickly shaved away, finally falling to 20% under the concentrated barrage of spells.

The Goblin Hunter turned to escape but was stopped dead in its

tracks.

“Want to run? Not so fast!” Bladelight took up Guard Stance to protect himself from the boss’s powerful attacks.

The Mages never let up, not even for a moment.

The Goblin Hunter bellowed out in rage, letting out a steaming whistle. Energy converged at the tip of its Magic Cannon which started to shine brilliantly.

“Priests, keep the Heals coming!” Nie Yan shouted anxiously.

Three cannon shots rang out in quick succession as several red-hot iron balls dropped to the ground and started rolling towards Bladelight.

Sensing the danger, Bladelight took out an Intermediate Health Potion while maintaining his Guard Stance.

Bladelight’s sense of awareness was by no means dull, but he was still a beat too late.

「Boom boom boom!」The three cannonballs exploded almost simultaneously, sweeping everything away. Bladelight was blasted away like a ragdoll and landed on the ground with a heavy thud.

The Goblin Hunter immediately took this opportunity to flee.

However, Yi Yan rushed up to take Bladelight's place and prevented its escape.

The Goblin Hunter couldn't charge past Yi Yan no matter how much it struggled. When its health fell to 10%, its cannon began to charge again.

Three cannonballs exploded in quick succession, blasting Yi Yan away.

"Don't let it flee! Go up one by one!" Nie Yan ordered, knowing that he had no choice but to sacrifice some players to prevent their target from escaping.

Charge!

Edgeless led the charge. None of the Warriors alive could take a single hit from the Goblin Hunter. They were going into this knowing full well they would die. However, they hoped to buy enough time for the Mages to finish the boss off in this final stretch.

Edgeless stalled the Goblin Hunter for a brief moment, only to be blown away by a cannonball.

The next to go up was Monochrome, though he didn't last long either. It was a tragic scene. The Warriors rushed up one after the other, meeting miserable ends, all for the sake of preventing the Goblin Hunter from running away. Their deaths only bought a few



seconds each. But even so, they advanced dauntlessly in an endless wave. As soon as one died, another would rush up to take their place.

Seeing the Warriors dropping like flies, the Mages couldn't help but feel their hearts ache. They intensified their barrage. They understood the sooner they killed the Goblin Hunter, the fewer lives would be lost.

Because their expedition team had Priests who could cast Revive, the death penalty was reduced to only 30%. However, this was still valuable experience lost. It would take them at least six hours of nonstop grinding to get it back!

The Mages frantically bombarded the Goblin Hunter with spells. Its health fell to 3%, 2%, 1%....and finally, 0%!「Boom!」It died in a fiery explosion, collapsing into a pile of scrap metal.

Looking at the ground, Nie Yan saw 36 corpses forming a long line. The Goblin Hunter had taken out a Warrior with every step.

The only reason the Goblin Hunter couldn't escape was thanks to the sacrifices of these players.

“Priests, come down from the buildings and start reviving them,” Nie Yan said. Even the tallest of the six buildings was only about 12 meters high. The fall damage wasn't enough to kill them at that height.

All the Mages and Priests jumped down from the buildings.

The Priests began reviving the fallen Warriors.

One Warrior gathered up all the loot from the Goblin Hunter. There were three pieces of equipment in total—one for a Warrior, one for a Mage, and one for a Thief.

“Boss, some leather armour for a Thief dropped! Holy shit! What luck! It’s a Legendary item fragment!” a team member exclaimed in excitement. Even though it was only a fragment, it was still extremely rare!

“Legendary item fragment?” Nie Yan asked in surprise. This was the first time he heard of a Thief Legendary fragment dropping on this map. However, a thought struck his mind. Could it be the Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga? “Quick, let me see it!”

## Chapter 260 – Golden Dragon

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The most drool-worthy item that dropped from the five Lords in Everlasting City was the Sub Legendary Winterthaw Dagger of Molag. Its attack power was rarely seen among one-handed weapons. Even some Sub Legendary two-handed greatswords paled in comparison. It was one of the most sought after weapons by both Thieves and Fighters.

Each possessing unique properties, only three Winterthaw Daggers existed in the game. When all of them were obtained, no more would appear.

Another notable item that dropped from Everlasting City was the Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga. Its drop rate was even lower than the Winterthaw Daggers.

Of course, this was due to it being one of a kind!

Since this was only a fragment of the Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga, its properties were inferior to a piece of Sub Legendary-grade equipment. Only when all the fragments were gathered together would its true power be restored.

But even after many years, no players in the previous timeline had ever restored the Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga. So the existence of this Legendary item was eventually forgotten.

Nie Yan didn't expect for something like this to drop on the guild's first pioneering expedition.

The properties of the Darkbright Chestpiece were shared in chat.

## Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga (Legendary)

Requirements: 290 Dexterity, 360 Strength

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## Darkbright Chestpiece (Fragment)

Requirements: 130 Strength

Description: This chestpiece still contains strong remnants of magic power. Seek out the other fragments—Darkbright Fine Feather Silk and Darkbright Rune Cloth—to restore the Darkbright Leather Armour of Solga.

Properties: Defense 370–386, Dexterity +20, Speed +20, Jump +10, Stealth +10, Cloaking +10, Reflex +10

Darkbright Barrier (Rank 3): Absorb 30% of all incoming damage up to a maximum of 1200 points for 3 minutes. Cooldown: 1 hour.

Restrictions: Thief; can be equipped by any faction.

What high defense! The properties of the Darkbright Chestpiece were undeniably great, especially the supplementary Darkbright Barrier (Rank 3). This piece of equipment was better than some

## Level 50 Dark Gold-grade Thief armour!

But the rather high Strength requirement made the Thieves in the expedition team shrink back. An anomaly like Nie Yan was perhaps the only one who could equip this Darkbright Chestpiece.

“Anyone want this chestpiece?” Nie Yan asked.

Nearly all Thieves shook their heads. With such an intimidating Strength requirement, how could any of them equip it?

Nie Yan looked at One Strike Vow and asked, “What about you? Want it?”

These players formed the core of Asskickers United, and a future Shadow Dancer like One Strike Vow was naturally no exception. If any of them wanted a certain piece of equipment, Nie Yan as their guild leader would do his best to provide. There were numerous other opportunities for him to obtain better equipment anyway.

One Strike Vow shook her head. “I only have 80 Strength, but all of that is from equipment and gems. There’s no way I can equip it.”

One Strike Vow still only had 80 Strength at her current level? This meant she had put all of her points into Dexterity!

When a Thief reached 500 Dexterity, a portion of it would be added to their attack power. At 1000 points, this bonus was

doubled. Almost every Thief liked to focus on this stat, but very few actually chose to go all in. Although a full Dexterity Thief was very nimble with high attack speed, their fatal flaw was that they sorely lacked damage. So many players who attempted this difficult build would eventually end up abandoning it, having no choice but to add some points into Strength.

If One Strike Vow reached 500 Dexterity, keeping up her gear quality to compensate for the lack of damage, she could be considered to have achieved some minor success with the build. After reaching 1000 Dexterity, she would be all in the clear.

A few other top Thieves also shook their heads when asked. Only Nie Yan met the requirements for the Darkbright Chestpiece. He could even equip it right away.

“I guess I’ll take it then,” Nie Yan said. When he no longer needed the Darkbright Chestpiece, he could simply toss it in the treasury. By then, many players in the guild would meet the requirements to equip it.

Nie Yan checked his stats after equipping the Darkbright Chestpiece. They had increased significantly. It gleamed with a dark luster, resembling a black jewel—bizarre and mysterious.

The other two pieces of equipment were Dark Gold-grade. Both were snatched up by for around 20,000 merit points each.

After calculating the price of the Darkbright Chestpiece, Nie Yan distributed 500 merit points to every member of the team, causing

them to rejoice.

Nie Yan wasn't the least bit miserly when distributing merit points. This made the players respect him all the more.

On a different note, the Goblin Hunter gave an extremely generous amount of experience. This allowed for almost all of the players to rise up by a minimum of 80% of a level, and so many people levelled up.

Aside from the three pieces of equipment, Nie Yan's group obtained the fifth Energy Key Fragment.

When all five Energy Key Fragments were gathered together, they started shining brilliantly before gradually merging into a complete glowing key.

Everlasting City Energy Key (Special Item)

“Boss, what's that thing good for?”

“According to the official website, it's used to open the gates to the Inner Sanctum of Everlasting City. What's that?”

Nie Yan didn't offer up an explanation. “Let's go take a look.”

Nie Yan led the way to the center of the square. Carved

throughout the towering, faintly glowing spire were murals narrating the golden age of the goblin civilization as well as their eventual decline. The remnants of their race was this city which had survived the ravages of time. It was thusly named Everlasting City.

The others followed closely behind Nie Yan. The broken brick floor beneath their feet sported cracks reminiscent of a turtle shell, which branched outwards in a bizarre, circular pattern.

Nie Yan's group arrived at the base of the spire, where they were greeted by ancient gates whose surfaces were mottled by rust. Still standing firm in spite of the passing of centuries, they were impossible to push open regardless of the force employed.

At the center of the gates was a giant lock with a keyhole. Constructed of intricate metal parts interlinked with one another, it exuded a rather remarkable impression.

Nie Yan held the Energy Key.

“These are the gates?”

“They don't really look like much. But I heard you can obtain the Energy Core of Everlasting City by opening them.”

“What's that for?”

“Who knows? It probably has something to do with



strongholds.”

The players chattered among themselves.

Nie Yan turned around to face the team members and said, “Wait out here for now. I’ll be out in a bit.”

Nie Yan didn’t have second thoughts about entering since there were no monsters in the Inner Sanctum. He slowly inserted the Energy Key into the keyhole, feeling strong currents of magical energy surge out from the lock’s tiny apertures before dispersing into the air.

Once the key was fully inserted, a blinding radiance shone from the ancient doors. Their previously mottled surfaces shone with brand-new splendor, as if they had never rusted at all.

Nie Yan slowly pushed open the door, then stepped inside where he was welcomed by nothing but darkness.

“Just run if you encounter any trouble,” Bladelight shouted from behind, sounding a bit uneasy.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be fine,” Nie Yan replied. There were no monsters inside the Inner Sanctum. He had nothing to be concerned about.

Nie Yan proceeded forward with nothing but darkness around him until he arrived at a meter-high stone platform, on top of

which sat a metal basin collecting light-green droplets trickling down from above.

The basin was filled to the brim with the falling green liquid.

Looking down, Nie Yan saw a glowing crystal at the bottom of the basin. It was the size of a goose egg, elliptical in shape and jade-green in colour.

It was the Energy Core of Everlasting City!

With it and a few NPC Barrier Masters, Nie Yan could construct a barrier powerful enough to hold off even Rank 5 advanced magic. That would be sufficient until players reached Level 150. Even in the previous timeline around when Nie Yan assassinated Cao Xu, there were only two Magisters who had learned Rank 6 advanced magic.

Barriers were immensely valuable to the defense of a stronghold, blocking incoming spells from the enemy while allowing outgoing spells to pass through. However, players could freely enter or leave.

This property alone made the Energy Core priceless.

Nie Yan reached into the basin and fished out the Energy Core. The green liquid that filled the basin turned impeccably clear as if its essence was drawn out along with the crystal.

He looked at the properties of the Energy Core.

Energy Core of Everlasting City (Junior): Generate 1 Megacycle of energy per day, maximum storage of 50 Megacycles of energy.

A Megacycle was a unit used by goblins to represent the intensity of energy. The energy released by a Rank 1 advanced magic spell was approximately 0.1 Megacycle. This meant a Barrier put up at a stronghold at maximum energy capacity could hold off at least 500 such spells!

It would take at minimum ten days before a second Energy Core was produced. I'll tell them to come here by themselves next time, Nie Yan thought. He wouldn't need to personally come back here again.

Nie Yan stored the Energy Core inside his bag, then headed back outside. Bladelight and the others walked up, welcoming him back.

"How'd it go? You got it?" Bladelight asked. He had looked up the uses of the Energy Core on the official website and now knew the importance it held.

"I got it." Nie Yan nodded. This trip to Everlasting City was well worth the time spent.

"What are we doing next?" Bladelight asked.

“Tell everyone to return to the headquarters. We’ll stay here with a few to grind a bit outside Everlasting City,” Nie Yan said. It wasn’t too efficient to have so many people levelling together.

At this moment, Nie Yan received a call from Guo Huai.

「Nie Yan, I heard a Level 40 Golden Dragon spawned east of Calore in Sinful Gorge. I checked the website and it says the Golden Dragon’s Horn can summon a Golden Dragon! Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine are heading there right now. Should we go as well?」Guo Huai asked.

The Golden Dragon was a rare, top-grade summon!

「Of course! Why wouldn’t we go? We have to join in on the fun as well!」

# Chapter 261 – Setting Out For Battle

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Golden Dragons were higher order creatures comparable to Super Variants or even Demonified Lords, with sightings of them popping up every once in a blue moon. Everyone would be notified of its appearance through the official website, where it would be frontpage news. Such a rare existence would inevitably attract the attention of all the large powers.

The five major guilds of Calore were mobilizing to seize this good fortune. A great spectacle was bound to unfold!

Nie Yan remained rather aloof, contrary to expectation. He hoped Asskickers United could snatch away the Golden Dragon. But there was no need to force things in the event they failed. He would be satisfied as long as they could reap some benefits. After all, the primary goal was still to suppress Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Whether in terms of average level or gear quality, the top players of Asskickers United were a step above the rest. Although they were ranked number one on the forums, there were many people who still held doubts. This event was the perfect opportunity for them to cement their position as the top dog in Calore.

“Are we going to fight for the Golden Dragon?” Bladelight asked. This would throw their initial plan of levelling in the outer regions of Everlasting City astray.

“Let’s see what kind of trouble we can stir up for Victorious

Return and Radiant Sacred Flame,” Nie Yan replied. There was no harm in setting aside levelling for another time. The expedition team had already benefited greatly from this trip to Everlasting City. Bladelight was currently sporting the Everlasting Dark Gold Set while his previous Everlasting Gold Set was passed down to Yi Yan. On top of that, they still had three surplus Everlasting Silver Sets. They were more than capable of crushing the now isolated Radiant Sacred Flame in the upcoming battle for the minor stronghold.

After news hit the official website, fervent discussion exploded in the guild chat.

「Watchful Snail, quickly inform the guild leader! Let’s slaughter Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame in Sinful Gorge!

「After we stomp on them a few more times, let’s see if they still dare to act so brash! 」

The players of Asskickers United were in high spirits. Their recent victories filled them with satisfaction and confidence. Morale was at an all time high, and the might of the guild was on full display. Now it was their turn to act unbridled, while the enemy was on the back foot.

However, Asskickers United’s arrogance was different from that of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. While the latter two held contempt for the average player, not hesitating to close off entire maps and indiscriminately slaughter others during their peak, Asskickers United’s disdain was solely directed toward them. The players of Asskickers United always loved to repeat a certain

line when out levelling in the wilderness, “Hmph! Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame aren’t worth a fart! This daddy is from Asskickers United!”

This line alone spoke of the impressive might of Asskickers United.

A group of hardworking analysts on the forums evaluated the strength of Asskickers United, Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine by comparing several important factors. They created an easy-to-understand table for the other forum visitors.

<b>Guild Name:</b>	Asskickers United	Holy Empire	Sapphire Shrine	Victorious Return	Radiant Sacred Flame
<b>Guild Level:</b>	4	5	4	5	5
<b># of Players:</b>	52,000	103,000	82,000	165,000	150,000
<b># of Players &gt; Level 25:</b>	23,200	10,800	11,000	12,200	12,800
<b>Avg. Player Level:</b>	23.8	17.9	17.6	18.1	17.8
<b>Gear Quality:</b>	267	156	196	185	186

When comparing these stats, people discovered that Asskickers United had about as many Level 25 or higher players as Victorious

Return and Radiant Sacred Flame combined. This density of high-level players left people speechless. Moreover, they were far ahead of the pack in terms of gear quality. Although Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame greatly outnumbered them, if a fight truly broke out, a single Level 25 player could kill at least 3 Level 20 players.

Taking this into consideration, Asskickers United was truly powerful enough to make the other guilds quake in fear.

As a result, Asskickers United became the unofficial leader in the alliance between them, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine. When the ordinary players of these three major guilds formed teams, any random player from Asskickers United would be superior in level or gear quality. This directly led to the players of Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine attaching themselves to Asskickers United.

When Sleepy Fox and Fa Lan noticed this situation, they could only reluctantly accept it. They simply couldn't afford a falling out with Asskickers United, since there was too much they needed them for. If it wasn't for Nie Yan, and subsequently Asskickers United, they would've never been invited to become shareholders of the Union of Assassins, which netted them great profits. In fact, it was a significant source of income which directly supported the growth of their guilds. Not to mention they needed the support of Asskickers United if they wished to contend against Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. Only with the support of Asskickers United would they dare face their enemy head on. But in the end, it mostly came down to their mindset of hiding behind a big tree where the shade was plentiful.



Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return already suffered dearly at the hands of Asskickers United. This led to the fighting spirit of the players from Asskickers United to rise with unstoppable momentum. Under Nie Yan's influence, these players developed a certain way of thinking. They believed Asskickers United was unstoppable and whoever remained unconvinced would receive a beating!

There were only two guilds unwilling to accept this, Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return!

It wasn't every day that the players of Asskickers United were given the opportunity to teach Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return a lesson. They were itching for battle.

「It seems like the guild leader is still off levelling somewhere.」

「What about Young Sparrow Hawk?」

「I think he's with the guild leader as well.」

「Ah, this isn't good! We can't let the Golden Dragon get snatched away by Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!」

The guild members anxiously awaited the return of their leader. Asskickers United's rules were very strict. Anyone that mobilized without permission would receive severe disciplinary action. In extreme cases, the offender would even be expelled from the guild. No one was willing to risk banishment from the top guild in

Calore, so they could only patiently wait for Nie Yan's orders.

「What's there to be anxious about? Didn't Holy Empire and Sapphire Shirine already assemble? Haste makes waste,」Nie Yan spoke out in the guild chat.

The guild chat exploded with activity.

「The guild leader is finally here!」

「Greetings, guild leader!」

「Boss, What's the plan? Just one word, and all of us brothers will mobilize!」

...

The guild members chattered on in a lively discussion.

「Everyone, calm down! Listen to what Nirvana Flame has to say!」Guo Huai shouted.

Not another word was spoken by the guild members. They showed complete respect for Guo Huai's authority.

「It'll be inconvenient with too many. We'll send a small force, 2,000 players should do it. All players Level 27 or higher should

come. The rest of you should go about your business. Don't even think about participating if your level isn't high enough!」Nie Yan instructed.

The Level 27 or higher players all cheered in celebration, while the players under level 27 all become deflated.

Nie Yan's orders were law. The unqualified could only stifle their breath and hurriedly increase their level. They received a harsh wake-up call. If they wished to participate in future guild activities, they would have to work hard and catch up to the top players of the guild. If they were to miss more opportunities like today, that would be too unfortunate.

The Level 27 or higher players returned to the guild headquarters, totalling a little over 2,000. It was quite impressive. The vast majority was Level 27, many of them hitting that level only today. There were very few Level 29s, while there were practically no Level 30s. After the implementation of the Buried History expansion, levelling became much easier, so their levels all rose.

Nonetheless, Asskickers United was perhaps the only guild that could assemble over 2000 Level 27 or higher players.

Nie Yan, Bladelight, and the other members of the expedition team returned to Calore.

As soon as Nie Yan's group stepped foot into the guild headquarters, they invoked a huge commotion. Seeing that the

guild leader had returned, a large crowd of players excitedly gathered around to greet him.

Nie Yan was extremely popular among his subordinates. It was he who led Asskickers United to create legend after legend. Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame wasn't only associated with Nie Yan, but it was the entire guild's symbol of glory.

"I'm a little envious of you." Tang Yao sighed with deep emotion. The unconditional support he received from so many people really showcased his class as guild leader. He couldn't help but be a little envious.

Back when Nie Yan showed off his strength in Kiln Fire Woods, he merely earned the admiration of his guild members. It wasn't until that speech he made when he led a band of brothers to save Withered Leaf that they truly accepted him in their hearts, earning their respect. Ever since then, they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to Asskickers United.

Whoever messed with the brothers of Asskickers United, whether it be Victorious Return or Radiant Sacred Flame, Asskickers United would retaliate in full force!

Nie Yan's speech was still fresh in their minds.

Nie Yan silenced the crowd of players who were in high spirits with his hands, then said, "A Golden Dragon has spawned in Sinful Gorge. Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, and our allies Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine have set out. According to

reports, each of them mobilized at least 10,000 players. We will join the fray with a mere 2,000. You might be puzzled, wondering why I, your guild leader, am being so miserly, only mobilizing such a small force.”

The guild members chuckled lightly.

Nie Yan’s teasing eased their hearts by quite a bit. Who would have expected that the normally reserved and solemn Nie Yan could also crack such jokes. These few simple words brought him much closer to these brothers of his.

“I’ll tell you. It’s because it’s only a Golden Dragon. We’re only going there to get some small benefits. Why would we bring more people? Such an effortless task doesn’t require us to act so urgently. I ask of you all, calm down. We’re going there to take a look and see if we can stir up trouble for Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, while also getting some easy benefits. However, this doesn’t mean we can slack off, and dim Asskickers United’s glory. From the moment we set out, I’d like you all to keep track of your kill counts. Whoever kills the most people, I’ll reward them with a full set of Dark Gold equipment!”

## Chapter 262 – Strongest Champion

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“How is that fair? We’re competing against people like Young Sparrow Hawk! We don’t stand a chance!” someone complained. Tang Yao, Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, and the others were simply too powerful. It was almost impossible for ordinary members to compete against them.

“That’s why all contracted guild members are excluded from this competition. The top 10 will receive a full set of Gold equipment while the top 100 will receive a full set of Silver equipment, all of which are Level 30. The rewards do not stack. All participants will receive 200 merit points,” Nie Yan replied. He didn’t bat an eyelid after promising so many rewards. His pockets were more than deep enough to bear the cost.

Asskickers United was no longer a fledgling guild. Its treasury had grown immensely after experiencing several guild wars. If Nie Yan didn’t dole out more merit points, the spoils of war would gather dust.

“Boss! You promised! Don’t go back on your word!” a guild member exclaimed, invoking the laughter of the surrounding players. Nie Yan chuckled lightly. He knew this player was only acting cheeky.

“Alright, let’s set out,” Nie Yan ordered. The 2,000 players from Asskickers United teleported from Calore to Soren Town, then headed for Sinful Gorge.

Nie Yan recalled the general topography of Sinful Gorge, a long passageway between two cliff walls about as wide as 30 players standing side by side that led into a wide open plain.

According to legend, Sinful Gorge was created during the Dark Era when the Dragon King Zennarde shattered the God of War Kelo's divinity with a mighty blow from his sword, marking the first of mankind's gods to fall in battle. The slash left behind a long gash on the land, unleashing a powerful explosion of dark power that carved out a deep basin. Even to this day the remnant energy lingering in the gorge prevented any vegetation from growing while nurturing countless creatures of darkness.

There was a cave in Sinful Gorge enshrouded in darkness where many powerful monsters resided. Even when the average player was over Level 100 during the previous timeline, It was labelled a forbidden zone no one dared to explore.

Nie Yan recalled a few other rumours, but he couldn't verify their authenticity.

Dragon King Zennarde's Sword was rumoured to be located in the deepest region of Sinful Gorge. Legends told that only a Paladin with a Holy Spirit Heart could pull this sword out, lest the wielder's soul be devoured by the undying demon spirit sealed inside.

Stories like these weren't verified on the official website. They were probably dug up from old lore books.

Sinful Gorge was a Level 20–25 map. It primarily gave habitat to undead, such as Bone Devils and Bone Beasts.

A Golden Dragon was undoubtedly a foreign existence to Sinful Gorge. This one had most likely undergone a demonic transformation. Why else would it relish in the dark energy permeating the area?

Golden Dragons were generally high level creatures at minimum in the 200 to 300 range. Players in the previous timeline could occasionally encounter them besieging a city or stronghold. Nie Yan had no idea why such a low level one appeared all of a sudden.

「What's the situation like in Sinful Gorge right now?」Nie Yan asked Guo Huai who had been constantly gathering information.

「Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame's forces number around 30,000 to Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine's 20,000. Both sides have already fought many times, with Holy Empire suffering the heaviest losses so far, losing over 5,000 players. The enemy is purposefully targeting them, and they're pretty much getting steamrolled. Thank god for Sapphire Shrine's support; otherwise, they would've been wiped out long ago,」Guo Huai replied.

「Any other movements from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame?」Nie Yan asked. With the appearance of a Golden Dragon, he felt the enemy might have something up their sleeve.

「Not that I'm aware of. Just those 30,000 players I mentioned earlier are fighting. I haven't received any reports of strange



movements,」Guo Huai replied. He also felt apprehensive. Things were strangely calm over on the enemy side. Over a hundred moles were planted among enemy ranks, but none of them reported back on anything out of the ordinary.

「Keep a close eye on things. They're probably biding their time for a big catch!」Nie Yan's expression turned frosty. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame would have definitely taken note of the special topography of Sinful Gorge. It would be foolish to believe they had no plans of sealing off the passageway.

Of course, Nie Yan had long since thought up a countermeasure. He wondered what sort of disappointed looks the higher-ups of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame would have when they found out Asskickers United had only sent out 2,000 players.

「One other thing. I heard Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors along with several other guilds have dispatched people to Sinful Gorge. Be careful!」Guo Huai warned. These were all major guilds. They were in no way inferior to Victorious Return or Radiant Sacred Flame.

Both Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame's growth had far outstripped that of Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors in the previous timeline. This was due to them starting out in Calore which had the highest player density out of all the cities in the Viridian Empire.

However, Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame's growth was greatly hindered by Asskickers United this time around, to the extent it wasn't even half of what it was in the previous timeline.

This was why they were roughly on par with Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors.

More than half of the elites who were supposed to join Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were among the ranks of Asskickers United!

In this timeline, the most powerful of the five major guilds under Cao Xu's control were no longer Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame but rather Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors.

This was precisely the butterfly effect brought about by Nie Yan's reincarnation into the past!

Bloodlust Blade's base of operations was Glory City, Alliance of Mage's was Moonlight City, and Divine Protector's was Kelond City. They had zero competition in their respective cities, so they grew virtually unimpeded. When more strongholds were released, their strength would rise by yet another level.

In this life, Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors would be far bigger threats than Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Since these guilds operated so far away from Calore, they could only afford to send several hundred people at most. At a rate of 2 gold per round trip for a single player, they simply couldn't bear the cost of sending a large force.

When land mounts were more universal later on, only then would these three guilds start posing any real danger to Asskickers United.

「How many players did Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors send over?」Nie Yan asked. He had no choice but to start paying attention to these three guilds. After all, with the addition of the Buried History expansion, land mounts were just around the corner.

Nie Yan estimated all the major guilds would control strongholds by then. That was when the most intense struggles would commence!

「Bloodlust Blades dispatched around 20 players. According to reports, Bloodlust Mad Blade is personally leading them. As for Alliance of Mages and Divine Protectors, both of them also sent out small groups. But I'm not too sure on their exact numbers.」

Bloodlust Mad Blade was a player who had a master class title in the previous timeline. He was extremely famous, and was known as the Strongest Champion. Although many disagreed with this title, that didn't matter because no one capable cared enough to challenge him anyway. Very few players with master class titles cared for the moniker of 'strongest.' They understood that at the top none of them could truly be titled the strongest. The vast majority of them were on the same plane of skill. Those who could absolutely dominate were practically nonexistent. This was why such a title was unsuitable on any of them.

Nie Yan felt it would be a little troublesome if he encountered a

player like Bloodlust Mad Blade. However, after looking at his fellow guild members, he couldn't help but think, Hmph! So what if he's a Champion? There's a ton of players with master class titles in Asskickers United. I could randomly pick out a whole bunch with my eyes closed! Champions, Sword Saints, Guardians, Archbishops... we don't lack any of them! Even if you're the Strongest Champion, all I have to do is send a bunch of other players with master class titles after you, and you'll end up getting crushed just the same!

Using a group of players with master class titles to gang up on a single person was definitely more awesome than simply using ordinary players.

Thinking to this point, Nie Yan's mood improved greatly.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had called these people over to help them. There was a good chance he would meet them again in the upcoming stronghold battle between Radiant Sacred Flame and Holy Empire.

「Nie Yan, remember when you told me to pay attention to the Cao Xu Century Financial Group? Well I received some information today. It's related to Radiant Sacred Flame,」Guo Huai informed him after recalling this matter.

「What kind of information?」Nie Yan asked, his tone turning much more serious when he heard it was related to the Cao Xu Century Financial Group and Radiant Sacred Flame.

「I got a report that Century Financial Group wanted to acquire Radiant Sacred Flame. But after only three days, negotiations fell through and both sides parted on bad terms.」

This was an extremely shocking piece of news!

「Wait, what happened? Why did they fall through?」Nie Yan asked in surprise, especially since he knew Radiant Sacred Flame was successfully acquired by Century Financial Group in the previous timeline.

「I heard Nightbreak Trickster was given an insultingly low offer, the reason being that Century Financial Group judged Radiant Sacred Flame had no potential for further growth. With the existence of our guild, they felt Radiant Sacred Flame's chances of victory in the upcoming stronghold battle were slim to none. There was also the possibility that Radiant Sacred Flame would end up getting crushed by our guild somewhere down the line. Since Century Financial Group failed to acquire Asskickers United, they've decided to abandon most of their business efforts in Calore.」

This was an unprecedented development!

Nie Yan never expected that his interference would lead to such a huge chain reaction. He had directly caused Century Financial Group to give up on acquiring Radiant Sacred Flame. In the previous timeline, they had acquired both Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. Didn't this mean they had no plans of acquiring Victorious Return as well?

Nie Yan felt cold sweat drip down his forehead. He believed that crushing Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return was simply the first step. He never expected his plans would go completely awry after completing it! Things had gone in an unknown direction. From now on, the future would be much more uncertain!

## Chapter 263 – Sinful Gorge

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Nie Yan sank into deep thought. With Century Financial Group withdrawing their presence from Calore, he felt some slight concern toward the uncertain future. But beyond that, he couldn't help but wonder what would change. Where would Cao Xu inject his capital? Which guilds would he end up buying? Would he still continue setting his eyes on Asskickers United and the War God Tribe?

But regardless of what unfolded, raising his strength was the top priority. So long as Asskickers United reached a certain level of power in the game, there would be no reason to fear Century Financial Group.

Nie Yan no longer lingered on this thought, turning his attention on dealing with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

“I'm going to head over to Sinful Gorge. You guys stay safe. Don't move without my word,” Nie Yan ordered. Like this, they wouldn't fall into any ambushes the enemy set up ahead.

Nie Yan was the first to leave town. He summoned the Faulkner Warhorse and rode off, leaving behind a trail of dust.

The players stared at his departing figure in shock.

Nie Yan was riding a mount?

None of them had ever seen a mount before, let alone see a player

ride one! Those found in NPC stables sold for at least 50 gold, some for even as much as several hundred gold. And they weren't even that great! Nie Yan's horse clearly belonged to a superior breed.

Clad in silver plate armour, Nie Yan's Faulkner Warhorse was gallant and brimming with power. It was fast enough to frighten players walking along the road. Just what was the movement speed bonus on that mount?

"Oh shit, the boss has a mount! Why did he never mention this before?"

"That horse looks pretty awesome! I wonder where he got it? Did he buy it?"

"No way! Even if he bankrupted the guild, I still doubt he'd have the gold to afford a mount like that." Undying Scoundrel shook his head. "He must've gotten it from a quest."

Even the most affordable mounts which increased movement speed by only 50% were currently beyond the reach of an average player. Those with movement speed bonuses of 100% cost upwards of several hundred gold, while the faster ones at 200% or higher were worth several thousand gold. As for the Faulkner Warhorse? Its movement speed bonus was clearly much higher than 200%! Nie Yan would have to empty out the entire guild treasury if he wished to purchase such a mount!

The envy in the atmosphere was palpable. Not only did Nie Yan have all sorts of amazing equipment, but he also owned such a



kickass mount!

Nie Yan galloped along the main road as the surrounding scenery blurred past him. Before long, he arrived at the outskirts of Sinful Gorge. He scouted around and discovered the presence of players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame as well as Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine. They were keeping watch.

Just as Nie Yan was passing through a patch of forest, he spotted a Thief from Victorious Return walking out onto the trail from some trees up ahead.

The Thief's eyes widened in astonishment.

Fuck! Why is my luck so shit!? Why is the Mad Rogue here of all places? He's even riding a goddamn mount! What a guy!

Even from over ten meters away, the Thief still recognized Nie Yan at a glance. His appearance was familiar to countless players.

At this moment, a shadowy figure jumped out from between the trees and dashed toward the Thief with blinding speed. The Thief was about to raise his dagger to defend when he was struck in the back of the head. He felt sharp pain piercing through his back, followed by a cold blade sliding past his throat. The last thing he saw was his blood splattered across the dirt before blacking out.

The new arrival bent down over the corpse and picked up his

spoils of battle.

Nie Yan stopped the Faulkner Warhorse to observe the battle. Not bad, I wonder which guild he belongs to. This mysterious Thief seemed to be around Level 23 or 24. Besides the dagger, the rest of his equipment was mediocre, perhaps Silver-grade at best.

On closer look this Thief was a member of Asskickers United! His name was Tyrannical, which sounded vaguely familiar to Nie Yan.

“Hello Boss!” Tyrannical greeted. He never expected Nie Yan to show up in this place.

“Mhmm.” Nie Yan nodded. He glanced at the corpse on the ground. “Good technique.”

The assassination of that Victorious Return player was well-executed.

“I’ve been reviewing your videos recently and practicing your moves. It’s been pretty effective!” Tyrannical was absolutely gushing over Nie Yan’s praise. It was a seal of approval from the Mad Rogue himself. This would be a lasting memory he would reflect on with pride!

“You’re levelling right now?” Nie Yan asked. Why was Tyrannical near the outskirts of Sinful Gorge?

“I’m a member of the Hundred Thieves,” Tyrannical explained.

“I’m scouting this area on Watchful Snail’s orders.”

To ensure the safety of Nie Yan’s group, Guo Huai had dispatched members of the Hundred Thieves to scout ahead. Apart from surveying the neighbouring areas, they were given another task, taking out enemy scouts! They had cut down quite a few of so far.

“If you’re from the Hundred Thieves, what’s the deal with your equipment?” Nie Yan asked in bewilderment. Why was an obviously skilled player wearing such garbage gear? Guo Huai had spared no expenses with the Hundred Thieves, giving them access to the best equipment the guild had to offer. There should be no reason for Tyrannical to appear so wretched.

“A few days ago I got into a fight with a group of seven players from Victorious Return. After killing three of them, I got careless and died, dropping all my equipment. I still haven’t fully geared back up yet. I guess I bit off more than I could chew.” Tyrannical let out an awkward laugh, conveniently forgetting to mention that he was trying to show off in front of a girl.

Tyrannical was currently Level 25. He should have been at least Level 27 before dying, a fairly decent place to be at this stage of the game. The drop in level due to the red name death penalty was indeed quite tragic.

“Go grab some suitable equipment from the treasury. If you don’t have enough merit points, you can pay the difference back later. Let Guo Huai know I told you that,” Nie Yan said. It was a bit of a shame for a such a good player to wear trash gear.

“Thanks Boss!”

“Be more careful next time. Don’t lose all your equipment again.”

“I won’t...” Tyrannical scratched his head with an embarrassed smile.

“I’ll be off then.” Nie Yan spurred the Faulkner Warhorse towards Sinful Gorge.

“Take care Boss!”

Nie Yan galloped away on the Faulkner Warhorse while muttering, “Tyrannical, Tyrannical, why does this name seem so familiar? I just can’t put my finger on it!” He racked his brains for a while before giving up. After all, it was impossible to remember every face he had come across in the past.

Nie Yan arrived at the entrance of Sinful Gorge. A good place to set up an ambush, he couldn’t help but remark. Before him was a narrow passageway enclosed by two steep cliff walls whose surfaces were remarkably smooth, resembling a clean cut from a blade.

Looking up, he could only see a thin strip of sky above him because of the massive cliffs on either side.

As Nie Yan took in the odd geography, he started to give credence to the ancient rumours claiming this gorge had been hacked open

in the distant past. After all, all legends had a basis in fact. Maybe the rumours had been spread by a player who found some source of information? Like how he had learned many lost secrets when he completed the Glimpse of Darkness.

This gash in the earth extended several hundred meters. This was the perfect chokepoint!

Quickly scanning the cliff faces, Nie Yan could already see seven or eight caves leading into the rock. Sinful Gorge had incredibly complex terrain, so there were naturally many caves snaking around.

「Guo Huai, how many Featherfall Jewels do we have in the treasury now?」Nie Yan asked. He had previously mentioned to Guo Huai that the guild should start stocking up on them.

「Only two, It can't be helped. Treant Forest on Specialist takes five days to reset after being cleared, and most of our members are too high-level to run that dungeon now. All we can do is organize the low level players in the branch guilds,」Guo Huai replied. What did Nie Yan want with so many Featherfall Jewels?

With only two Featherfall Jewels in hand, Nie Yan's plan would have to be scrapped.

Nie Yan thought for a moment and formed a new plan on how to deal with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Nie Yan galloped through the passageway on the Faulkner Warhorse, arriving at the center region of Sinful Gorge where he was greeted by an extremely chaotic battlefield. The players from Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine were duking it out everywhere. Both sides were virtually piling on each other.

「Enter Sinful Gorge!」Nie Yan ordered the Asskickers United players in the rear.

The chaos of the battlefield ignited Nie Yan's fighting spirit. He unsummoned the Faulkner Warhorse, then jumped into the fray and slaughtered several players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return in quick succession

「I'm at Sinful Gorge. Where are you right now?」Nie Yan asked Sleepy Fox.

「Hmmp! So you finally decided to show up? My guild has already lost over 7,000 players!」Sleepy Fox was clearly upset about his losses. If Asskickers United had continued to be absent, he would've cussed Nie Yan out even harder.「We're in the center of Sinful Gorge, at 673. We've already started attacking the Golden Dragon. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame are both here as well.」

From Sleepy Fox's tone, Nie Yan could roughly imagine how hectic the situation was!

「I'll be there in a moment,」Nie Yan said after looking at the coordinates. The '673' Sleepy Fox gave weren't the full coordinates, only the last three digits. But since they were all in the same general vicinity, that much would suffice. As a matter of fact, a single digit was enough to give an exact position in some smaller areas.

Nie Yan immediately rushed toward the location given by Sleepy Fox.

It wasn't long before Nie Yan spotted a massive figure in the distance. This was a Golden Dragon! A ferocious creature that stood almost ten meters tall, with a bulky abdomen, four thick limbs, razor-sharp claws, menacing teeth, and a gigantic pair of wings. An oppressive aura permeated the air around the dragon.

Nie Yan noticed this Golden Dragon's wings were corroded. It was clear they wouldn't generate enough lift for flight.

Golden Dragons were normally completely gold in colour. But there were strange black veiny runic patterns all over this one. Nie Yan's heart shook in alarm. This was a sign of demonification!

It was a Level 40 Demonified Golden Dragon!

## Chapter 264 – Jack The Ripper

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The Golden Dragon let out a deep roar and breathed out a wide cone of fire, wreaking havoc on the surrounding players. The unlucky souls in front of the dragon perished immediately.

A single Dragon Breath cleared out a large swath of players.

Spells rained down from the sky like a dazzling display of fireworks. But they were merely hitting in the single digits while the Golden Dragon had well over 500,000 health. Killing this Level 40 Demonified Lord truly wouldn't be an easy feat.

The players were divided into several camps with each monitoring the movements of the others closely.

Not just Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, Sapphire Shrine, and Holy Empire, but many other guilds were attracted by the emergence of the Golden Dragon as well, including the likes of Splendid Temple, Unhindered, and Dark Hero.

Several tens of thousands of players from other guilds had gathered in Sinful Gorge. There was no way to distinguish who belonged to which side.

It was a chaotic scene.

Holy Empire, Sapphire Shrine, Radiant Sacred Flame, and Victorious Return grew cautious when the other guilds arrived.



Although these newcomers were all second-tier guilds, their strength couldn't be underestimated. For fear of inadvertently making enemies out of everyone, the four major guilds began exercising some restraint. If not for this, they would've continued their all-out brawl until either side was completely wiped out.

All the guilds were after the loot that dropped from the Golden Dragon!

The Golden Dragon's Horn was especially coveted!

Many players were well-aware that they were too weak to compete in this playing field, but they still arrived nonetheless to scrounge whatever they could get. Who knows? They might even snatch away the drops by some miraculous stroke of luck.

Nie Yan employed the Silk Spinner Ring to ascend to the top of a large tree, where he quickly spotted the players from Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine occupying a corner of the battlefield in the northeast from the higher vantage point. Sleepy Fox was together with several others Warriors at the forefront while the Mages behind them released a constant stream of spells at the Golden Dragon.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame's forces were all the way in the southwest. At the center of map was a large crowd of players from other guilds. Even if the two sides wanted to fight, they had no way of reaching each other.

Under the intense barrage of spells from the Mages of all the

guilds, the Golden Dragon's health fell to around 40%.

“How many brothers have died to the Golden Dragon in the last 10 minutes?” Sleepy Fox asked, turning his head to Undying Battle Fervour beside him.

“Over 600,” Battle Fervour replied.

Sleepy Fox felt his blood run cold. These casualties were far too terrifying.

The Golden Dragon was simply too domineering. Holy Empire's forces had gone out of their way to attract as little attention as possible, yet they still lost so many people.

Even though every guild was trying their best to avoid being targeted, playing a dangerous game of hot potato with the Golden Dragon's aggro, none of them escaped suffering losses. If all of them stopped attacking or the damage fell below a certain threshold, however, its health would start quickly regenerating. So everyone kept attacking; otherwise, their previous efforts would go to waste.

As for how these guilds were dragged into the fray, nobody knew.

The Golden Dragon's Horn was simply too alluring to pass up. This item was something everybody wanted. A whole crowd of Warriors and Thieves had gathered around the Golden Dragon. When it died, they would immediately jump into action to seize the

loot.

Furthermore, many small battles broke out across the battlefield. The players of the four large guilds had skirmished countless times, while the smaller guilds got into scuffles with each other as well.

「How long have you guys been fighting for?」Nie Yan asked Sleepy Fox.

「Around two hours ago, not long after the Golden Dragon was discovered. We've clashed with Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return five times so far, with everyone suffering heavy losses. When the second-tier guilds arrived, all sides decided to call a temporary truce where we'd settle our grudges after killing the Golden Dragon. We've been cooperating for close to half an hour now,」Sleepy Fox replied. So long as he obtained the Golden Dragon's Horn, he would be satisfied. It was an item all players drooled over.

Nie Yan looked over to the forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. He spotted a few familiar faces such as Tangerine and Skinny Dog. However, many of Victorious Return's elites were missing from this battle since they were locked up in Calore's jail cellars. As he shifted his attention to Radiant Sacred Flame's side, someone caught his eye—Nightbreak Trickster!

Although they had never personally met, Nie Yan could recognize Nightbreak Trickster's appearance thanks to a video Sleepy Fox had shared of him.

Nightbreak Trickster wore azure robes covered with all kinds of mysterious runes. He gave off a strange feeling.

Nie Yan recognized the robes as they belonged to the Extorter Set, one of the best Level 30 Mage sets. While squatting atop the tree branch, the corner of his lips curved into a devious smile. Just how would the players of Radiant Sacred Flame react if their guild leader was cut down right in front of them?

Nie Yan wasn't sure how skilled Nightbreak Trickster was as a player, but he could ascertain one thing: any person capable of leading a large guild wouldn't be weak!

In the previous timeline, Nightbreak Trickster was a very enigmatic figure. He never revealed his name on any leaderboard, and he was rumoured to be a very formidable Magister. But no one knew for sure because he was so reclusive and rarely ever took action himself.

With so many Radiant Sacred Flame players nearby, Nie Yan didn't dare to claim with absolute confidence that he could assassinate Nightbreak Trickster. Such a task would prove incredibly difficult, especially since his target this time was very skilled.

However, that didn't deter Nie Yan in the slightest. He inherently liked to take risks, so he was itching to give it a shot.

Nie Yan shifted his attention back to the center of the battlefield.

The Golden Dragon was undoubtedly a formidable foe, laying waste to everything at close range while incinerating players with Dragon Breath from afar.

An idea popped into Nie Yan's mind. He would take advantage of the Golden Dragon!

Since all the Mages were dealing pitifully low damage individually, Nie Yan would be able to instantly attract the Golden Dragon's aggro if he hit it in the double or even triple digits!

Nie Yan's lips curved into a faint smile. He now had a course of action!

Just as he was about to execute his plan, Nie Yan spotted around 60 figures from Radiant Sacred Flame's side entering stealth while moving in the direction of Holy Empire's forces!

These Thieves were planning to ambush Sleepy Fox!

Radiant Sacred Flame had provided these Thieves ample cover, so Sleepy Fox had no knowledge of what just occurred.

A player targeted by so many Thieves would surely die!

While Nie Yan was thinking of a way to kill Nightbreak Trickster, so that he could deal a heavy blow to the spirits of Radiant Sacred Flame's players, Nightbreak Trickster had aimed his sights on Sleepy Fox who was fighting at the forefront.

If Sleepy Fox died, Holy Empire's morale would plummet!

「Sleepy Fox, watch out. Radiant Sacred Flame dispatched Thieves to ambush you!」Nie Yan jumped down from the tree. As soon as he touched the ground, he shot out like an arrow toward the direction of Holy Empire's forces.

Nie Yan's speed was extremely astonishing, especially on this rugged terrain.

Holy Empire had just finished their preparations for snatching away the Golden Dragon's drops from the other guilds, and Sleepy Fox was occupied with directing the Mages in the backline when he received Nie Yan's warning.

Sleepy Fox's heart trembled. "Priests, cast Illuminate!"

Dazzling orbs of light shot up into the air one after the other, casting a flood of radiance over the battlefield which revealed several dozen approaching silhouettes sticking close to the Golden Dragon for cover.

The Golden Dragon's aggro was focused solely on the Mages in the distance, spewing out a constant stream of flames which wiped out player after player, so it didn't take notice of the Thieves dashing past its body.

Just at this moment, the Golden Dragon slammed down on the

ground and struck a Thief who happened to be nearby.

-723!

Of the 60 Thieves in the group, only this unlucky fellow was crushed to death. The others safely passed the Golden Dragon and pounced toward Sleepy Fox.

The route Nightbreak Trickster had these Thieves take was extremely crafty. They closed in on their target without a hitch, resembling sharp daggers with only a single aim.

When the Priests lit up the surroundings with Illuminate, the Thieves had already arrived.

Even though Sleepy Fox wished to engage the enemy, he understood the impact his death would have on the players of Holy Empire. Not allowing his emotions to affect his judgement, he retreated.

“Battle Fervour, Violent Waves, protect me!” Sleepy Fox shouted. Both Battle Fervour and Violent Waves ran up and attempted to hold the enemy off.

But there were too few players guarding Sleepy Fox. How could they possibly hold off the assault of nearly 60 Thieves?

Over a dozen Thieves pounced on Violent Waves and Battle Fervour. Faced with so many enemies, they could only do their

best to defend.

A silhouette dashed past the action and arrived where Sleepy Fox retreated. The dagger in its hand struck out at his forehead, piercing through the air like a lightning bolt!

What a fast attack! Sleepy Fox raised his greatsword to block.

「Klang!」The two blades clashed.

Fortunately, Sleepy Fox was also a heaven defying figure. Even though his role as guild leader left him always busy, his skills hadn't declined in the slightest.

Only now did Sleepy Fox get a good look at his opponent: a man in his thirties with a horizontal scar extending across his nose. He radiated an aura of desolation, leaving a profound impression on anyone who saw him.

This was the number one Thief in Radiant Sacred Flame, Jack the Ripper!!

He was a military veteran who became a professional player. After joining Radiant Sacred Flame, he quickly became their top Thief. His skills were absolutely at the peak!

Sleepy Fox never expected to encounter him like this!



Jack the Ripper locked Sleepy Fox down, leaving him unable to flee while a swarm of Thieves approached. No matter how good he was at defending, he would still die just the same.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The Holy Empire Mages in the rear blasted away several of the Thieves gunning for Sleepy Fox.

However, even more Thieves rushed forward to take their place.

Shockwave!

Sleepy Fox swept his greatsword in a wide arc, unleashing a wave of force that sent over a dozen Thieves flying back. Just as he turned to flee, a cold light flashed and he was struck in the back of the head!

## Chapter 265 – However Many Arrive, However Many Die

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With so many Thieves pouncing on him, Sleepy Fox was hard-pressed to resist no matter how much of a heaven-defying figure he was. A pair of fists was no match for four hands!

When Sleepy Fox sent the Thieves flying away with Shockwave, Jack the Ripper took advantage of the opportunity to stun him with Smothering Strike.

A nearby group of Warriors from Holy Empire rushed forwards in an attempt to rescue Sleepy Fox, but they were intercepted by several dozen Thieves from Radiant Sacred Flame.

Sleepy Fox endured the combined assault from five Thieves. As a tanky Warrior clad in heavy armour, he wouldn't go down too easily.

“Kill him, quickly!” Jack the Ripper shouted somberly. Time was short. He circled back to the front, stunning Sleepy Fox once again with a Concussive Blow.

Before he could follow up with another attack, his pupils constricted as he spotted the unmistakable sheen of a dagger stabbing toward his forehead. This attack was incomparably domineering, sharp and executed with pinpoint precision, resembling the strike of a viper! He cancelled his attack mid-animation, activated Swift Retreat, and rapidly pulled back.

What a fast attack! Jack the Ripper inwardly remarked, raising his dagger to block as a metallic ‘klang’ rang out. After retreating several meters, he felt cold sweat wash over him as he recalled the sensation of the dagger barely grazing his forehead. This was fear in its most primal form. He didn’t dare imagine the consequences if that attack landed.

Jack the Ripper focused on his opponent only to see a translucent silhouette dart past at a speed too fast for even his eyes to follow.

The Thieves ganging up on Sleepy Fox were flabbergasted. Why did their leader pull back all of a sudden? Before they could register what happened, a dagger materialised across the neck of one of their companions. It was a phantom blade appearing without warning, the very scythe of the Grim Reaper!

Splitting Edge was covered in sawtooth serrations, a queer design meant to inspire fear and intimidate.

Cut Throat!

Within the span of a breath, Splitting Edge effortlessly cut through the vulnerable flesh on the Thief’s neck as a spray of blood blossomed out like a bewitching rose.

-630!

It was an instant kill!

That Thief's health bar emptied out, and he collapsed to the ground.

Everything happened too quickly, no one could react in time. While they were still reeling in shock, Sleepy Fox finally regained control of his body. Spinning Slash! He swung his greatsword in a wide arc, unleashing a sword beam that radiated outward in every direction.

The Thieves were knocked back several steps. When the figure supporting Sleepy Fox revealed itself, they looked as though they had seen a ghost.

After killing the Thief, Nie Yan's stealth wore off.

The Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame!

The Thieves sucked in a collective gasp, forgetting they were in the middle of combat. When Nie Yan emerged, one Thief was forced to retreat, another died a miserable death, and the remaining four were scared out of their wits.

Sleepy Fox breathed out a sigh of relief after drinking an Intermediate Health Potion. "Thanks, you saved my life just in the nick of time. A few seconds slower and I would've died." He was down to only 39% health before Nie Yan arrived. The attacks of those Thieves really packed quite a punch.

“No problem. Since when haven’t I been timely?” Nie Yan smiled. He coolly surveyed his opponents before settling his gaze on Jack the Ripper who had retreated far away. Out of all the Thieves present, perhaps only this player was barely a match for him.

Radiant Sacred Flame’s ambush was a disaster. The Warriors from Holy Empire finally broke through the blockade; the Thieves tasked with holding them back were all killed.

“Boss, we’re here!” A Fighter clad in a full set of Gold equipment led the group of Warriors as they charged at the four Thieves surrounding Sleepy Fox and Nie Yan.

The group of 60 Thieves from Radiant Sacred Flame suffered a catastrophic defeat. Determining that the situation could no longer be salvaged, Jack the Ripper activated Stealth and turned to escape.

He knew the title of ‘Mad Rogue’ was not just for show!

Although the exchange between them was brief, maybe a few seconds at most, Jack the Ripper could clearly sense the gap in skill between him and Nie Yan. It was like the difference between a pebble and Mt. Tai! Simply recalling that awe-inspiring attack sent shivers down his spine.

Nie Yan’s eyes flashed with a cold light when he noticed Jack the Ripper attempting to flee. You want to run? It won’t be that easy!

Eye of Truth! Nie Yan's eyes turned bloodshot while the veins near his temples bulged out. He instantly located the fleeing silhouette of Jack the Ripper.

Shadow Waltz! Nie Yan disappeared.

Shortly after sensing a pair of eyes lock onto him, Jack the Ripper felt a cold nip behind his neck. It's the Mad Rogue! No one else could catch up this quickly! A suffocating pressure bore down on him the moment this thought crossed his mind, causing his breathing to turn ragged.

The name 'Mad Rogue' alone was enough to give the vast majority of players goosebumps. Add this sort of mental pressure to Nie Yan's absolutely domineering combat style, and most of his opponents would be defeated long before he touched them!

Not only was this title Nie Yan's glory, but it was also a form of deterrence.

Dance of Death! Nie Yan slowed down somewhat as his footwork grew more complex. He started leaving behind a trail of after-images. Afterwards, he vanished; all traces of him disappeared with the wind.

Those who had never performed the Dance of Death would forever be unable to grasp this phenomenon.

Jack the Ripper was fleeing with all his might, but he could still

sense Nie Yan hot on his tracks as though the footsteps of the reaper were approaching ever closer. But that sensation faded away all of a sudden, and he could no longer detect the slightest presence. His mind was filled with doubt. Why did he disappear? Did he give up...?

No! He's still here!

The deadly premonition in his heart grew even more intense. He swung around to face the enemy head-on, only to be met with a serrated dagger stabbing toward his forehead; the ghastly aura surrounding the blade froze his blood and very soul.

Just as Jack the Ripper attempted to parry the attack, the dagger disappeared. A split second later, he realized he couldn't move, as though his body was nailed down in place.

This was the effect of the Intimidate skill!

Nie Yan emerged behind Jack the Ripper and struck him in the back of the head with Smothering Strike.

Jack the Ripper fell into a stunned state. Nie Yan's attack was simply too fast. He had no chance to resist.

Nie Yan followed up with a Backstab and Eviscerate. As three damage values floated up into the air, Jack the Ripper's corpse collapsed to the ground.

“I say, Nirvana Flame, why haven’t the players from your guild arrived yet?” Sleepy Fox turned around only to discover the person he was talking to had disappeared. He blanked for a moment, then spotted Nie Yan cutting down Jack the Ripper some 20 meters away. “Shit! Isn’t he way too fast?”

Sleepy Fox only turned his back for ten or so seconds at most. But during that time, Nie Yan had killed a Thief more than 20 meters away!

“Hey, who’s that Thief lying on the ground over there?” Sleepy Fox asked. He felt the player Nie Yan had just killed looked very familiar.

“I-I-I think that’s Jack the Ripper, the top Thief in Radiant Sacred Flame!” a Holy Empire player stuttered.

“Oh...” Sleepy Fox nodded his head listlessly. A moment later, he finally processed what happened. Just what kind of person was Jack the Ripper? He was extremely difficult to deal with! Holy Empire had suffered many times at his hands. Yet he was killed by Nie Yan just like that? What kind of preposterous turn of events was this!?

“Holy shit! When did that guy become such a demon?” Sleepy Fox couldn’t help but exclaim in exasperation. Was this person still even human? Just how did he train?

Jack the Ripper dropped two items. One was a Dark Gold leather chestpiece. Although its properties weren’t bad, it couldn’t



compare to the Darkbright Chestpiece. The other was a somewhat damaged, ancient parchment scroll.

### Cahill's Parchment Scroll (Damaged): Seeker's Memories, 1/3.

Many lines of eccentric characters were written on this old, sheepskin scroll.

Cahill was a legendary Thief. She was a Treasure Hunter who loved exploring. It was rumoured she discovered a peerless treasure buried deep in a region in the remote underworld. However, she later vanished after being pursued by the demons of the underworld, only leaving behind a few clues.

These sorts of items were difficult to find. Despite there being so many fragments in the previous timeline, very few players actually restored a Legendary-grade item. The same was true for treasure maps.

After tossing the scroll in his bag, Nie Yan walked back to Holy Empire's forces. He gazed at Radiant Sacred Flame's side in the distance where he was met with the icy cold gaze of Nightbreak Trickster. About a hundred meters separated both groups.

Nie Yan's emergence shook the hearts of all the leaders from the other guilds present within Sinful Gorge. He was perhaps the only player with such a powerful deterring effect.

“You really are a piece of work. Even Jack the Ripper couldn’t escape your dagger. I bet Nightbreak Trickster is boiling over with anger right now.” Sleepy Fox chuckled. None of the 60 Thieves dispatched by Radiant Sacred Flame had survived. The previous battle was quite thrilling. If Nie Yan hadn’t arrived in time, he would’ve died for sure.

Nie Yan revealed a calm smile. It was a trivial effort for him to deal with the players of the present by relying on the techniques of a Shadow Dancer. It would be quite a while before they started posing a real challenge.

Nie Yan observed the attack patterns of the Golden Dragon, then began setting about the preparations to execute his plan.

“I just received some information. Bloodlust Blades just captured their first stronghold. Alliance of Mages rose to a Level 6 guild. Their numbers have broken through 300,000. Finally, Divine Protectors are about to fight over a stronghold as well. We have to hurry. We can’t fall behind,” Sleepy Fox said as he gazed in the distance. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were obstacles in their path. Only by removing them could they thrive. Holy Empire had branches in other cities, so their information network was better than that of Asskickers United.

Nie Yan nodded. After analyzing a bit, he understood why Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors dispatched people over here. Calore was the largest city in the Viridian Empire. If a guild was allowed to expand in this city without any competition, it was easy to imagine what kind of monster would be born. The strongest guild in the city was

currently Asskickers United, and the only thing holding them back was Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. As the big shots in their respective cities, Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors definitely didn't wish to see a united Calore, so they naturally tried to hinder Asskickers United's growth.

The only reason Sleepy Fox informed Nie Yan about this was that Asskickers United appeared much too lax in dealing with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. If Asskickers United's players came out in full force, Holy Empire absolutely wouldn't be in such a weak position right now, to the extent that he was almost killed.

Nie Yan was aware of the current situation. He turned to Sleepy Fox and replied with a smile, "No worries, I understand what you're trying to say."

Sleepy Fox nodded. Since Nie Yan understood, there was no need to say more.

Nie Yan checked back with his forces. The 2,000 players had already arrived in Sinful Gorge, and they were currently making their way towards Holy Empire's forces. The players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return exploded with killing intent and charged toward them.

However, these players were all steamrolled. The domineering display from the players of Asskickers United left the people of Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine dumbstruck. These 2,000 players were a match for 10,000!

Bathed in the blessings of the Priests, the Warriors of Asskickers United all roared into battle, showing off exceptional valor.

As long as the Priests kept up the healing, these Warriors wouldn't break a sweat even if they were outnumbered one to ten. Even the quality of the Priests in Asskickers United was much higher than their counterparts in Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

「Boss Nightbreak Trickster, Asskickers United's forces have arrived,」Skinny Dog informed.

「How large is their force?」Nightbreak Trickster asked. His heart was stirred. Their main enemy had finally shown up.

「Around 2,000, all of them are Asskickers United's elites. They've already killed over 3,000 of our players.」

「Only 2,000!?!」Nightbreak Trickster was slightly disappointed. But his mood quickly recovered after thinking for a bit. These players were all elites of Asskickers United. If they were all wiped out, it would still deal them a heavy blow.「We'll proceed with our original plan. Mobilize 20,000 players here. Gear all of them up in novice equipment. When Asskickers United's players kill them and get branded with red names, we'll trap them here in Sinful Gorge. Let's see how they'll escape then!」

Nightbreak Trickster originally believed Asskickers United would at least send over 10,000 players. If all of these players were

trapped in Sinful Gorge after being branded with red names and prevented from teleporting back to the city, they would be like turtles trapped in a jar. It would be easy pickings. Who could've imagined Nie Yan would be so prudent, only bringing 2,000 players over. Even so, wiping out 2,000 elites was better than nothing.

A horde of players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame swarmed into Sinful Gorge. They were all wearing novice equipment, and their levels weren't high either, around Level 10 or so, each dispatched with the express purpose of dying to the enemy.

After Nie Yan was informed of this by Guo Huai, he immediately understood what Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were trying to do.

「What are we going to do?」Guo Huai asked anxiously. If those 2,000 players kept killing the fodder sent by Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, their kill counts would rise to ludicrous levels and so would the severity of the red name penalties for dying. They had fallen directly into the enemy's trap.

「We let our players kill to their hearts' content. However many arrive, however many die!」Nie Yan declared as his killing intent soared to the sky. If the heavens were dropping meat pies, why wouldn't they take a bite? Although these players were all relatively low-level, for them to agree to go on a suicide mission, Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame would've definitely had to pay some heavy compensation. He wondered just how many merit points they they would be forced to dole out per death.

## Chapter 266 – Golden Dragon’s Massacre!

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Each major conflict was a significant financial test imposed on all participating guilds, particularly so for Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame whose repeated defeats and catastrophic losses, combined with the ceased investments from Century Financial Group, marked the end one of their reign in the game. Their finances continued to be hammered away by Asskickers United, with each strike driving these two guilds further and further down into the abyss.

Even if it took all of their available capital, Nie Yan would continue to whittle down Radiant Sacred Flame. After all, Asskickers United could afford the price!

Victorious Return was in a slightly better position. They weren’t under as much pressure as Radiant Sacred Flame, whose war with Holy Empire never settled down. Thousands of conflicts both minor and major had occurred between the two guilds, with casualties reaching in the excess of hundreds of thousands according to various reported battlefield statistics. Radiant Sacred Flame had long since emptied their treasury, accruing heavy debt for their extended survival. The basis for this struggling lay in a single hope: the upcoming stronghold battle! As long as they were victorious, they would outlast this crisis—maybe even renew enough confidence to receive resumed funding from Century Financial Group. The stronghold was their last hope. If they failed, their guild was destined to collapse.

The conflict in Sinful Gorge would be the last before the upcoming stronghold battle. If Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame wiped out the elites of Asskickers United and Holy

Empire, it would be a decisive moment in reversing their declining fortunes!

It was a solid plan to use the Golden Dragon as bait to deal a heavy blow to the forces of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine. However, Nie Yan wasn't some helpless fool who resigned himself to fate.

If these 2,000 players from Asskickers United could slaughter their worth in gold, it wouldn't be a bad trade-off.

Falling down to a quarter health remaining, the Golden Dragon bellowed out a series of words chanted in the dragon language and summoned a blazing black meteor which crashed down from the sky. It exploded in an ocean of flames which engulfed the several hundred players within the impact zone, causing them to vanish into motes of light as their equipment dropped to the ground.

The destructive power of the black meteor was even greater than that of advanced magic. Yet at the same time, its cast time was clearly much shorter.

The havoc wreaked by the Golden Dragon caused many people to go pale.

Nie Yan raised an eyebrow in surprise. In the previous timeline, he had never been in this sort of situation before. Such spectacles were rare. This was his first time experiencing the might of a Golden Dragon. He wondered how powerful the pet summoned from the Golden Dragon's Horn would be. Higher-rank creatures

would generally possess special innate abilities.

Nie Yan initially hadn't been all that concerned with the Golden Dragon's Horn, but his interest was piqued after this attack.

Even if the summoned Golden Dragon was inferior to the current one, Nie Yan had an Evolution Crystal in his bag, an item that vastly increased a pet's stats!

Thinking to this point, Nie Yan't couldn't help but get excited. Having a Golden Dragon as a pet does sound like a pretty good idea...

The crater created by the impact remained wreathed in flames for a while longer before eventually extinguishing.

With a whole region cleared by the dragon's spell, Mages from all over the place swarmed back in and resumed attacking.

They were not willing to give up when the Golden Dragon was so close to death!

As the Dragon Breaths started increasing in frequency, players never seemed to stop evaporating into motes of light in the face of the blazing attacks.

The Golden Dragon's corrupted scales which were covered in strange vein-like patterns reflected a dark luster. Its massive body brimmed with unrivalled power as it wildly massacred the players



surrounding it.

Since nearly all the damage it received was from spells, the Golden Dragon would spew out a mouthful of Dragon Breath in the direction of any Mage that attracted too much aggro, clearing out a wide area, and then move on to the next target. Outside of turning around every once in a while, it generally stayed in the same place.

Subjected to the relentless barrage of spells, the Golden Dragon's health pool dipped below 15%.

"Everyone, keep it up! We're at the final stretch! Prepare to fight for the loot the Golden Dragon drops!" Sleepy Fox shouted. As he turned around to speak to Nie Yan, he noticed the person had disappeared yet again. Just where did that guy run off to now? As he pondered over this, a certain name crossed his mind. Nightbreak Trickster! He waited with baited breath for the spectacle that was about to play out.

Seeing the Golden Dragon's health falling lower and lower, Nie Yan decided it was time to act. He activated stealth and disappeared from everyone's sight.

Nie Yan avoided being spotted as he made his way toward Radiant Sacred Flame's forces.

Nightbreak Trickster anxiously directed the Mages under his command. He was still brooding over his failed ambush, especially since the Thieves he had dispatched were so close to succeeding. And they would've too were it not for Nie Yan's intervention. So

he was one of the first to notice when the target of his hatred had suddenly disappeared from the battlefield.

“Priests, cast Illuminate!”

Dazzling orbs of light flew up into the sky, illuminating the ground below. However, no trace of Nie Yan was to be found.

“Shit, where’s that bastard!?” Nightbreak Trickster cursed. Out of nowhere, five bolts tore through the air, shining with a frightening glint, straight towards the Golden Dragon.

Those bolts had been fired behind Radiant Sacred Flame’s forces, and all of them struck the Golden Dragon square on, dealing over 20 or so damage each.

What high damage!

All the Mages in Sinful Gorge could only hit the Golden Dragon for single digits. Virtually none of them hit in the double digits. So the string of damage values in the low 20s floating up into the sky were extremely conspicuous.

For a crossbow to deal so much damage, this was an inconceivable matter!

Crossbows were generally only used to lure mobs, having no impact when dealing with a boss. However, the damage of this crossbow was way too perverse!

Nightbreak Trickster and the rest of Radiant Sacred Flame's forces looked back. As a preventative measure, every Mage reserved a meter or two of empty space between one another for free movement and dodging attacks. However, a single person appeared in one of those exact spots: a man with dark leather armour, armed with a double-handed crossbow so big it was half the size of the ones mounted on city walls during sieges. The taut bowstring and five deathly bolts exuded an image so powerful it would remain deeply rooted in their memories.

They were most certainly familiar with this person.

Nirvana Flame!

The Mages had never expected Nie Yan to just pop up among them without so much as a peep. They were in utter shock.

“Kill him!”

Only now did the surrounding Mages react. They all targeted their spells at Nie Yan.

Nie Yan activated the Darkbright Shield as a faint curtain of light enveloped him before over a dozen spells rained down on him. 「Bang! Bang! Bang!」He immediately lost 53% of his health.

When Nie Yan noticed Nightbreak Trickster coldly glaring at him, he revealed a strange smile.

Seeing Nie Yan's expression, Nightbreak Trickster suddenly had an uneasy premonition.

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz, disappearing from everyone's sights.

"Don't let him escape," Nightbreak Trickster shouted, ordering all the nearby Priests to cast Illuminate.

Glowing orbs shot up into the sky.

However, Nie Yan's Shadow Waltz prevented him from being seen through stealth for the first six seconds after its activation. By the time his silhouette was revealed by the piercing light of Illuminate, he had already broken out of their encirclement. It was too late to stop him.

Before anyone had a chance to give chase, a world-shaking roar reverberated through the air. The faces of the players from Radiant Sacred Flame paled from fright. When they turned around, they spotted the Golden Dragon charging toward them. In an instant, they understood this was Nie Yan's plan all along!

All the Mages were only dealing damage in the single digits. However, Nie Yan's crossbow had hit in the double digits, not to mention five times in a row. He had instantly attracted the aggro of the Golden Dragon.

The Golden Dragon let out an enraged roar and spewed out a mouthful of Dragon Breath, scorching over 20 players from Radiant Sacred Flame to death in an instant.

However, Nie Yan had long since memorized the attack patterns of the Golden Dragon. He easily avoided the Dragon Breath.

The outcome was the surrounding forces of Radiant Sacred Flame becoming Nie Yan's scapegoats.

The Golden Dragon had yet to land a single attack on Nie Yan, and its aggro still remained on him. It knew where he was heading to and blasted its breath in that direction.「Bang!」The scorching fire engulfed that patch of ground.

Nie Yan quickly dashed through a group of Radiant Sacred Flame players. His speed was extremely quick. By relying on the footwork of a Shadow Dancer, none of them were able to stop him. He was extremely crafty, running wherever enemy players were most densely concentrated. He was a walking calamity for Radiant Sacred Flame.

The Golden Dragon became increasingly enraged as its attacks failed to land on Nie Yan. It plowed through the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame, spewing out Dragon Breath endlessly.

It was like a scene out of the apocalypse. One Dragon Breath after another cleared out wide swaths of players from Radiant Sacred Flame.

When the Golden Dragon charged through Radiant Sacred Flame's ranks to get to Nie Yan, it left a path of utter carnage, creating chaos everywhere.

Nie Yan dashed toward a dense group composed of a hundred casters from Radiant Sacred Flame. He wondered if they would be able to survive a blast of Dragon Breath.

Sensing Nie Yan's approach, a Shadow Priest let out a sharp howl.

Howl of Terror!

In that instant, Nie Yan activated the Mind Immune skill from the Slaughter Fiend Medallion, rendering the Howl of Terror completely ineffective. He closed in on the Shadow Priest and slashed his throat.

Blood sprayed out into the air, and the Shadow Priest collapsed to the ground.

As the nearby Mages in the group were about to rain down a shower of spells on Nie Yan, they discovered their target had disappeared.

At this moment, a blazing black meteor came crashing down on them.「Boom!」The resulting explosion engulfed a 20 meter area, leaving behind a sea of embers that continued to burn away at the earth.

The ground was paved with the corpses of Mages.

Over half of Radiant Sacred Flame's forces were annihilated, suffering over 3,000 casualties. The remaining were all scattered about. Their combat strength had diminished greatly.

The leaders of the guilds participating in this battle looked at each other as chills went down their spine. Had Nie Yan lured the Golden Dragon to their player formations, they would be the ones being slaughtered by the monster! How many Dragon Breaths and spells could they possibly take on? They came to a silent consensus on one thing: never, ever, make Asskickers United their enemies!

The Golden Dragon's massacre pained Nightbreak Trickster so much he felt as if his heart were bleeding. These players were Radiant Sacred Flame's elites!

The 5,000 or so Radiant Sacred Flame players in the vicinity had been mowed down to just over 1,000.

## Chapter 267 – Magic Ignition

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Thieves held many advantages over Elementalists. They were known as the kings of the wilderness as well as experts of the battlefield. They could stealth at a moment's notice, hide in plain sight, and travel to every corner of the battlefield unobstructed. Even the speed at which they ran far outshined any other class. Although an Elementalist had a fair chance against an equal-level Thief in battle, they were terrible at pursuit. If a Thief wished to flee, a slower class like the Elementalist would generally be helpless to stop them.

Seeing his own forces drop like flies, Nightbreak Trickster was boiling with anger.

What's so damn great about a Thief!?

Nightbreak Trickster rarely ever took action. But this wasn't to say he was weak. He simply understood that a guild leader who was only valiant and good at fighting wasn't enough. Even if they were a god of war, they still wouldn't be immune to defeat. Every class had its counters, it just happened his was a Thief.

Although Nightbreak Trickster was skilled, he knew he wasn't invincible.

A guild leader who emerged victorious in every battle was undoubtedly an immense morale boost to the members of his guild, just like Nie Yan. Even now, he had yet to suffer a single defeat. This was why the fighting spirit of Asskickers United was



so unprecedentedly high!

But in reality, Nie Yan was walking on a very thin tightrope!

There were many capable people in the world!

When someone killed Nie Yan, breaking the undefeated streak of the Mad Rogue and shattering his legend, his zealous followers would be brought back to reality, and their morale would plummet.

In this aspect, Nightbreak Trickster felt he was wiser and acted with more prudence. What a guild leader needed to do wasn't to be an unstoppable battle god but rather maintain their dignity and mystique.

He would normally never personally step into action, unless he was guaranteed to succeed. But after seeing so many of the brothers that he hand-picked himself being slaughtered, he could no longer hold himself back!

Even a saint felt anger!

“Mages and Paladins, buff me!” Nightbreak Trickster shouted, while buffing himself. He waved his staff as magical energy frantically converged on him, his robes fluttering violently.

Every last Priest and Paladin in Radiant Sacred Flame began casting their buffs on Nightbreak Trickster.

His stats rose explosively!

Indomitable Will! Paladin's Might! Haste! Power Transfer! Holy Blessing! ...

In an instant, Nightbreak Trickster received over 20 buffs. It didn't matter whether or not they had minimal impact on him. Intelligence, Strength, Dexterity, etc, they were all greatly enhanced. Although only six of these buffs raised his Intelligence, Magic Power, or other Mage related stats, his combat power was still greatly bolstered.

He was radiating a faint white aura. This was the visual effect of so many buffs stacked on top of him.

Nightbreak Trickster waved his staff, causing halos of magical energy to descend and revolve around him.

Magic Ignition!

The mana cost of all Elemental Spells were doubled in addition to consuming 2 mana every 3 seconds. The duration of this magic was 3 minutes while the cooldown was 5 days.

Nightbreak Trickster felt a scorching energy smoldering in his abdomen as his mana began to slowly drain. His stats increased by roughly 30%.

Elemental Spell Effect +300%. Intelligence +100%. Cast Speed +100%.

Advanced buffing magic. This type of spell was harder to come by than ordinary Elemental Hall Magic. It was hard to say which was superior.

Magic Ignition was similar to some of the skills found in Nie Yan's Glimpse of Darkness.

This sort of state was difficult to maintain since the player would burn through their mana much quicker on top of bleeding mana every three seconds. Even a Mage with a mana pool of over 2,000 points would be hard-pressed to sustain this sort of expenditure for long.

Speed of the Windwalker!

Speed of the Windwalker was a common Elementalist spell which increased the player's movement speed by 30%, giving them somewhat of a leg up when fleeing or kiting. But even with this boost, an inherently slow class like the Mage still couldn't outrun a Thief's pursuit or Warrior's Charge!

But right now, Speed of the Windwalker was transformed into an entirely different beast. With Magic Ignition in effect, its movement speed bonus was quadrupled to 120%, rivalling the speed of some of the better mounts!

Nightbreak Trickster's movement speed rose dramatically. This spell really was worthy of its name.

After buffing himself, Nightbreak Trickster went in pursuit of Nie Yan. He was only a few steps from the Golden Dragon, but he acted bold and daring, disregarding its existence completely.

With its aggro solely focused on Nie Yan, Nightbreak Trickster had no need to worry about the Golden Dragon suddenly switching targets

Icicle Shower!

Nightbreak Trickster determined Nie Yan's rough location by going off the Golden Dragon's line of sight. With a wave of his staff, he unleashed a shower of icicles from the sky.

These icicles resembled tiny needles, and were densely packed, covering an area of 30 by 30 meters. As they rained down on the ground, a curtain of 2s and 3s rose up into the sky from the heads of the hundreds of players caught in the storm.

This Icicle Shower wasn't meant to deal heavy damage.

An icy fog slowly expanded outward, causing tiny ice particles to cling onto each and every player. Everyone was affected without exception, including Nie Yan who was stealthed.

Icicle Shower slowed the movement speed of all affected players

by 20%. But when Nightbreak Trickster cast the spell in his buffed state, the slow was increased up to 80%!

Nie Yan noticed the Icicle Shower coming down on him early on. But he knew that no matter how fast he was, he couldn't evade it. He quickly drank an Ice Resistance Potion. After the spell fell, the temperature of the surrounding area plummeted and a dense icy fog permeated the air. Even with the support of his resistances, his movement speed still fell by 60%. What a potent effect!

Nie Yan was alarmed. This was the most formidable Icicle Shower he had ever witnessed! He looked over his shoulder, only to see Nightbreak Trickster waving his staff with many rings of magical energy revolving around him. It took only a single glance for Nie Yan to understand what was going on.

It was Magic Ignition!

In the previous timeline, despite seeing its power reduced with every successive patch, this perverse spell still remained one of the most powerful at an Elementalist's disposal!

At the later stages of the game, around 1% of all Elementalists had this spell in their arsenal. As for the present, those who knew Magic Ignition could probably be counted on one hand!

Before the first set of nerfs, Magic Ignition was an extremely terrifying spell.

Nie Yan's eyes flashed with killing intent. Magic Ignition still had one fatal drawback. After it wore off, the player would enter a weakened state for one minute where all their stats were reduced by 80%.

Even so, while Magic Ignition was active, Nie Yan didn't dare to face Nightbreak Trickster head-on.

Truthfully, he would become immune to all of Nightbreak Trickster's attacks if he just activated Adjudicator of God. However, this skill was a last resort. He wouldn't easily reveal it or any of his other trump cards.

Absolute Zero Ice Spikes!

Nightbreak Trickster waved his staff, after which ice spikes erupted from the ground at a terrifying speed.

Anyone hit by these ice spikes would be frozen in place. They were truly terrifying!

When cast without the buff of Magic Ignition, this spell wasn't all that powerful. The enemy would be given ample time to dodge as there was a delay before they erupted from the ground. But with Magic Ignition active, this delay was practically taken out of the equation.

Nie Yan rolled out of the way while ice spikes broke through the ground beneath him. They were over a meter long, and were

sparkling and clear.

Even though these ice spikes missed, more came shooting out of the ground.

Absolute Zero Ice Spikes synergized well with Magic Ignition as it had a short cooldown, low mana cost, fast attack speed, and a powerful crowd control effect. Any target struck would be immobilized!

The last time Nightbreak Trickster activated Magic Ignition, he had killed an extremely tanky Fighter by freezing him in place using these very same ice spikes. This was what was so terrifying about Magic Ignition. Even low-level spells which were otherwise harmless would become lethal after being enhanced by its effects!

Due to the increased casting speed, there was very little delay between attacks, leaving Nie Yan dodging frantically. There were multiple close calls where he had nearly been hit. In the previous timeline, he had died a total of five times to Elementalist with Magic Ignition. However, this was the first time he experienced someone utilizing the spell with such ferocity.

While Magic Ignition was active, low-level spells such as Ice Spikes, Small Fireballs, and Magic Missiles could be cast with little to no downtime.

Nightbreak Trickster's performance made it abundantly clear that he understood how to take full advantage of Magic Ignition.

Nie Yan rolled out of the way to dodge another set of ice spikes, only to notice the ground beneath him trembling faintly just as he regained his footing. More ice spikes erupted from the ground. He quickly sidestepped, but was still a step too late as one of the ice spikes brushed his leg, transferring a cold energy through his body.

“He’s over there! Kill him!”

At this moment, the Mages of Radiant Sacred Flame disregarded their safety and rained down a shower of magic on Nie Yan.

Nie Yan’s eyes quickly searched around until he spotted a nearby tree. Extending out his arm, he shot out a web line at a branch and jumped.

After swinging five or so meters, he landed on top of the branch.

Everyone was shocked. None of them expected Nie Yan to have such a skill!

Just what was this, a web line?

At this moment, the Golden Dragon breathed out a mouthful of flames.「Boom!」Gravel and sparks flew out in all directions as the scorching heat wave roiled.

Nightbreak Trickster was surprised such an intense barrage of attacks still couldn’t lock Nie Yan down. Magic Ignition was



rapidly expending all his mana. He took out an Intermediate Mana Potion from his bag and drank it, immediately recovering a good chunk.

It appeared killing Nie Yan with these sorts of tricks wouldn't work.

The magical power around Nightbreak Trickster began surging as his robes fluttered violently. The staff raised in his hands radiated a dazzling light, it was as though a deity was descending upon this world.

Nightbreak Trickster and Nie Yan locked gazes, fighting spirit burning intensely in their eyes.

At this instant, Nie Yan who was sitting atop the tree branch revealed a sinister smile. He pointed his thumb downwards, then aimed his dagger at his neck and made a cutthroat gesture.

The dagger in Nie Yan's hand shimmered with a sharp light, while his killing intent chilled the air around him.

Just like the time he killed the guild leader of Unhindered Hei Zhou, when Nie Yan revealed that ice cold smile, resembling the face of a smiling devil, the temperature on the battlefield seemed to plummet several degrees.

# Chapter 268 – Divinity

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The battle in Kiln Fire Woods which made Nie Yan an overnight sensation had become an unforgettable memory in the minds of the players.

Ever since, the popularity of the Mad Rogue spread like wildfire.

After so long, Nie Yan revealed this gesture yet again. What did it mean? Was it a death sentence?

The guilds in Sinful Gorge were all watching the scene unfold from the sidelines. They had looked on as Nie Yan lured the Golden Dragon to the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame, plunging their ranks into chaos. In the same fashion, they witnessed him directing the cutthroat gesture towards Nightbreak Trickster.

This was a declaration of war! It was pure provocation!

Was Nie Yan planning to repeat the events of Kiln Fire Woods?

Radiant Sacred Flame wasn't Unhindered, and Nightbreak Trickster wasn't Hei Zhuo!

When Nie Yan was still relatively unknown, Nightbreak Trickster was already an illustrious figure, a publically acknowledged expert! The only reason he wasn't the topic of every conversation was that he rarely stepped into the limelight!

From the moment he activated Magic Ignition, Nightbreak Trickster had put on a dominant display. He always kept his opponent on the backfoot. And on more than one occasion, he was only inches from killing Nie Yan.

Although Radiant Sacred Flame had suffered disastrous losses, Nightbreak Trickster still had a good number of people by his side. Among them there was no lack of Warriors and Paladins. With so many people protecting him, he had nothing to fear.

Did Nie Yan really have the confidence to turn the tide under these circumstances?

It was easy to talk the talk, but what about walking the walk?

No one believed Nie Yan would succeed, especially not the target of his provocation.

Nightbreak Trickster's expression turned even colder. This arrogant gesture was the final tipping point. He began gathering power as magical energy surged around him. His body slowly levitated until it was about half-a-meter off the ground, whereupon the surrounding players felt a heavy pressure descend on them.

The Warriors and Paladins guarding Nightbreak Trickster's side subconsciously retreated several steps. Their hearts shook in alarm. It was that spell! Even they weren't quite clear on the specifics of this buff magic.

“You want to kill me, Mad Rogue? Give it your best shot!” Nightbreak Trickster thundered. He resembled a divine being overlooking the world with contempt!

Divinity!

Nightbreak Trickster chanted out a series of deep and resounding syllables as all magical energy within a hundred meter radius surged toward him.

Nie Yan’s expression paled. This son of a bitch even knows Divinity...? Magic Ignition and Divinity were rewards that could only be obtained by completing the first two quests of a six-part quest chain, similar to Karsi’s Blessing. It was rumoured in the previous timeline that those who could complete the second quest were few and far between.

Divinity temporarily granted the player unlimited mana on top of removing the cast time and greatly reducing the cooldown of up to three non-advanced magic spells. Just like Magic Ignition, there was also a heavy backlash for activating this spell.

The magical halos around Nightbreak Trickster vibrated in resonance, producing an audible hum.

Nightbreak Trickster’s body was like a whirlpool, rapidly drawing in the surrounding magical energy in the atmosphere.

He waved his staff, Blizzard!

Storm clouds instantly blotted out the sky, evoking a bone-chilling tempest that plunged the world in ice and snow.

Shit! What the hell? He made Blizzard an instant-cast spell!

Seeing the ice and snow crashing down on the battlefield, Nie Yan jumped down from the tree and melted into his surroundings. He attempted to escape the spell's range by maneuvering around with Dance of Death.

The howling blizzard swept over the tree behind Nie Yan, instantly turning it into an ice sculpture.

Nie Yan never imagined Nightbreak Trickster to have another powerful trump card at hand. He was heavily considering activating Adjudicator of God right about now. Only this spell could counter Nightbreak Trickster's relentless barrage of magic! If he had known he would be dealing with this sort of situation, he would've taken the time to unlock a few skills from the Glimpse of Darkness! After all, there was no such thing as too many aces up your sleeve!

Nightbreak Trickster's barrage of attacks was far from over. Countless spells rained down onto the battlefield, freezing everything in their path!

He was unable to detect Nie Yan's exact position, who had deaggroed the Golden Dragon after entering stealth. All he could do was rely on his high Awareness to determine where to attack.

A pair of icy hands shot out in the direction Nie Yan was fleeing. He quickly pivoted to the side and rolled away.「Boom!」A layer of frost expanded out like a blooming ice lotus, freezing everything it touched in a 5-meter radius.

Thankfully, this spell was slightly off-target and missed Nie Yan by a hair's breadth. It was clear that Nightbreak Trickster had still underestimated his opponent's speed.

Nightbreak Trickster sped up his attacks, unleashing one ice spell after another like a gatling gun.

Off to the side, the guild leaders who were dealing with the Golden Dragon while also enjoying the spectacle had dull looks on their faces. They never imagined that the usually low-key Nightbreak Trickster could explode with such ferocity.

Nie Yan was perhaps the only player who could endure such an intense barrage of spells for so long.

Ice Wolf!

Nightbreak Trickster chanted several syllables in a deep tone, invoking the surrounding ice elements to rapidly condense into an enormous wolf, standing 2 meters tall and sparkling translucently. It let out a deep howl, revealing its sharp teeth.

The Ice Wolf bounded toward Nie Yan, leaving behind a trail of

ice.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Dazzling orbs of light shot up into the sky, revealing Nie Yan's silhouette under their piercing radiance. The light bouncing off the Ice Wolf's crystalline body refracted the colours of the rainbow.

The Golden Dragon no longer paid any heed to Nie Yan. It was currently attacking the nearby players of Unhindered and Dark Massacre.

The area the Golden Dragon laid waste to had become Nie Yan's arena.

Nie Yan quickly pulled back after seeing the massive Ice Wolf going straight for him. It had 600 health, and its ice armour granted it high resistance against physical attacks. He didn't dare to underestimate it.

Nightbreak Trickster was actually this low-key. He had so many powerful spells up his sleeve, some that no one in the previous timeline had ever seen him use. He was even more formidable than the top Mages in Asskickers United! Were it not for Nie Yan's provocation, it would've been very difficult to make him reveal his true strength.

“Today, this place will be the burial ground of the Mad Rogue!” Nightbreak Trickster declared in a cold tone that seemed to originate from the depths of the underworld.

If Nie Yan died, would he still be the Mad Rogue?

A fallen legend was nothing but a shell of its former glory.

The Ice Wolf leaped high into the air and pounced on Nie Yan, blasting him with a frigid frost aura. Its sharp claws radiated with a soul-shaking sharp light and swiped toward his throat at a lightning-fast speed. It looked like the ice and snow were about to be dyed red with his blood.



## Chapter 269 – Kill!

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Nie Yan swiftly retreated. His eyes flashed with a sharp light. The Ice Wolf's claws inched ever closer to his throat, signalling imminent death. In that instant, he activated Shadow Waltz and gave himself an explosive burst of speed, dodging the claws by a hair's breadth.

His figure blurred before disappearing without a trace.

The Ice Wolf missed its pounce and landed on the ground. It quickly sniffed around in an attempt to find traces of Nie Yan, but it was to no avail.

Nie Yan retreated a good distance away. He had no intention of facing the Ice Wolf head-on. He pulled out the Cavalry Crossbow and fired at the Golden Dragon.

「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Five bolts flew out and struck the Golden Dragon in quick succession.

The Ice Wolf bounded toward Nie Yan after spotting him again.

Due to Nie Yan's damage being far above what others could deal, the Golden Dragon reaggroed onto him. It let out an angry roar, chanting several syllables in the dragon language, and breathed out a surging torrent of Dragon Breath.

However, Nie Yan didn't try to evade. In that instant, the Ice

Wolf leaped high into the air and pounced in front of him.「Boom!」 An explosion rang like a clap of thunder. The Dragon Breath struck the Ice Wolf mid-air with unmatched power, instantly blasting it into smithereens as a shower of ice crystals gently fluttered down from the sky, glistening beautifully under the sunlight.

It was a scene straight out of a winter wonderland.

The Ice Wolf was blasted apart by the Dragon Breath!

Seeing his plan come to perfect fruition, Nie Yan revealed a satisfied smile.

It would've been a real headache to take out the Ice Wolf by regular means, even more so with Nightbreak Trickster glaring at his back like a tiger stalking its prey. In such a scenario, it was hard to say who would come out on top.

Nie Yan borrowed the Golden Dragon's power to effortlessly kill the Ice Wolf. With this obstacle taken care of, his hands were freed up to deal with Nightbreak Trickster.

Nightbreak Trickster was alarmed by the sudden death of the Ice Wolf. It appeared he had played right into the opponent's hands. Both Nie Yan's timing and ability to grasp the situation and adapt were superb. He had no time to call the Ice Wolf off.

Witnessing the Ice Wolf's miserable death, the various guild leaders dropped their jaws in shock. Even this was possible? They

previously believed Nie Yan was dead for sure when they saw the Ice Wolf pouncing on him. Who could've predicted the situation would be reversed in an instant?

A nimble mind and sharp insight were crucial for becoming an expert. Outside of relying on your own strength, it was also pivotal to learn how to seize an opportunity, just like how Nie Yan was exploiting the environment and everything within to gain the upper hand.

It was a brilliant strategy to bait the Ice Wolf into the path of the oncoming Dragon Breath!

While the various guild leaders were still mesmerized by the death of the Ice Wolf, Nie Yan's silhouette blurred into action as he dashed toward Nightbreak Trickster, causing all eyes to refocus.

Would Nightbreak Trickster fall today, just like Hei Zhuo? Everybody was eager to find out. They previously believed Nie Yan had no way of succeeding. But now, they weren't so sure anymore. There was a very real possibility he would exceed expectations yet again.

At this moment, the players of Radiant Sacred Flame felt immense pressure. The Warriors and Paladins closely guarded Nightbreak Trickster, not leaving any cracks in their ranks. They were confident nothing could get past them.

Eyes of the Divine!

The eyes of the Paladins emitted a dazzling radiance as they scanned their surroundings for signs of Nie Yan.

The Priests cast Illuminate nonstop as dazzling orbs of light shot up into the sky. However, Nie Yan was simply too fast. They had no time to tag him with a Marking Sigil before losing track of him.

Very few Priests could cast Marking Sigil in less than 3 seconds.

Leader Young Seven and Ten Li Painted Muslin required 2.6 and 2.7 seconds respectively to cast Marking Sigil, while those slightly slower such as Black Heaven and Moon Child required around 3.1 seconds. Every individual had areas they excelled at; Young Seven and Painted Muslin's just happened to be PvP.

Ordinary Priests required four seconds or longer to cast Marking Sigil, while those who took five or six seconds could be found everywhere. The Priests in Radiant Sacred Flame were far from being as skilled as Young Seven, Painted Muslin, and the others, so Nie Yan wasn't pressured by them.

Seeing their iron-tight defenses, Nie Yan couldn't help but sneer. You think this alone can stop me?

A dazzling orb shot up into the sky and revealed Nie Yan's silhouette. Within two seconds, ice spikes erupted from the ground beneath him at breakneck speed.

Relying on his sharp senses, Nie Yan rolled out of the way. He felt

the ground tremble as more ice spikes erupted around him. It appeared Nightbreak Trickster wanted to rely on his enhanced state to overwhelm his opponent.

At this moment, Nie Yan was also feeling the pressure as he constantly leapt and rolled out of the way, while ice spikes erupted out right under him every time he touched the ground. Out of nowhere, ice spikes erupted out right in front of him. He was going to collide with them in the next moment. If he was hit by them and stopped for even a second, he would be skewered by endless ice spikes.

This was exactly why Nightbreak Trickster's skill was so dreadful.

Nie Yan suddenly accelerated and spun himself around to evade. He could feel the ice spikes brushing against his back, transmitting a frigid aura through his body.

While dodging them, Nie Yan came to a realization. Blindly relying on speed was no good. It made his movements too linear, allowing the opponent to preemptively strike. He began varying his tempo, constantly shifting directions as he pressed closer toward Nightbreak Trickster.

Around 20 meters separated both players. Nightbreak Trickster was guarded by a ring of players at the 10 meter mark.

When some of his attacks started going way off mark, Nightbreak Trickster's mind slightly trembled in alarm. He noticed Nie Yan's

movements gradually becoming harder to predict until he had no idea where to attack anymore.

Nie Yan had already memorized the Golden Dragon's attack pattern. He estimated it was going to attack with another Dragon Breath very soon.

Nie Yan made a beeline for the wall of Warriors and Paladins protecting Nightbreak Trickster.

“There he is!”

“Kill him!”

Nie Yan simply swept past. He was too fast.

A brilliant orb flew into the sky, revealing Nie Yan's silhouette. Just as the Priests raised their staffs to tag him with a Marking Sigil, something occurred that made their eyes widen in shock and terror. The Golden Dragon opened its maw and spewed out scorching hot Dragon Breath in their direction.

“Run!”

“Shit, Dragon Breath!”

The players of Radiant Sacred Flame cried out in alarm, panicking as they tried to save their own skins.

Nightbreak Trickster slightly raised an eyebrow in surprise and quickly retreated far away. With the buff from Speed of the Windwalker, he made it to safety with ease.

「Boom!」The Dragon Breath crashed into the crowd of players from Radiant Sacred Flame, causing gravel and flames to fly everywhere. A wide area was scorched black, and over 20 players died on the spot.

A large crack was opened up in Radiant Sacred Flame's defenses.

It was total mayhem!

The Golden Dragon charged over, plowing through Radiant Sacred Flame's forces. The air tight wall of Paladins and Warriors that took great effort to form was destroyed beyond recognition.

In order to evade the Golden Dragon, Nightbreak Trickster had no choice but to retreat far into the distance, arriving in an empty area without any other players.

Divinity and Magic Ignition were about to end, while he was struggling to keep his nerves in check.

He gazed into the distance, only to see Nie Yan staring back at him with a cold smile before disappearing into stealth.

Nightbreak Trickster had lost the protection of his players. From this point forward, it would be a one versus one.

Seeing Nie Yan disappear, Nightbreak Trickster's heart trembled. He finally felt the domineering pressure coming from the threat his opponent posed to him.

He recalled Nie Yan's cruel smile atop the tree branch, a biting cold killing intent that made a person's blood run cold.

Death was slowly encroaching in on him.

Before long, he felt an intense sense of danger from behind him. This bastard's quick!

Nightbreak Trickster waved his staff, Repel!

He quickly turned around, but there was no sign of Nie Yan.

Nie Yan had baited him into wasting Repel!

Hidden in the shadows far off in the distance, Nie Yan let out a faint snicker. The psychological attack he launched on Nightbreak Trickster had already begun showing its effect. All he would have to do was put on the pressure to instill a sense of foreboding into the enemy, causing them to make lapses in their judgement. Their defeat would follow.



No matter how skilled a person was, they still had their weaknesses.

Nightbreak Trickster's weakness was that he cared too much about defeat since it would mean a heavy blow to Radiant Sacred Flame. So when he was truly put in danger, he couldn't maintain his normally calm mindset.

As for Nie Yan, he had gone through two lifetimes. These sorts of things had long since become meaningless to him. So what if he was defeated? What was important was an unbreakable and unbendable will! With this kind of will, even if you were stomped into the ground, you could still climb back up and give the other person a good punch. In the previous timeline, Nie Yan had patiently endured for so many years waiting for Cao Xu to lower his guard before dealing the fatal blow. If he couldn't accept something as simple as defeat, his two lifetimes would've been wasted.

Even if Nie Yan was placed into the most dangerous situation, he would still maintain absolute calm. This was one of the things that allowed him to finally break through the barrier of a Shadow Dancer in this life.

Nie Yan was continuously taunting Nightbreak Trickster from a distance, occasionally launching feints and directing his killing intent at the opponent. Nightbreak Trickster's heart was already stretched extremely taut. Even the slightest breeze would cause him to cast a spell.

While the two were still fighting, the Golden Dragon roared in

anger. Under the concentrated barrage from the Mages, its health finally bottomed out. It let out a mournful cry before crashing heavily to ground, giving rise to a cloud of dust.

“We killed the Golden Dragon!”

“Go, grab the loot!”

# Chapter 270 – Dividing Up The Loot

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Everyone in Sinful Gorge cried out in alarm. Hundreds of players from various guilds scrambled toward the Golden Dragon's corpse in an attempt to snatch away the drops. All hell broke loose as not a single guild was willing to give up on the most important drop, the Golden Dragon Horn!

Which lucky player would get their hands on this coveted item?

Several fleet-footed Thieves were merely feet away, only to be flanked by a group of charging Warriors.

Another group of Warriors rushed past them and made a grab for the drops.

Within the chaos, no one could differentiate between ally or foe. Not that it mattered. Everyone wanted the loot for themselves anyway!

Roaring Flames!

A Mage finished chanting as a large blazing cloud condensed in the sky. A torrent of fireballs rained down over the battlefield, wiping out a huge swath of players in a 20 meter radius around the Golden Dragon's corpse. Their bodies transformed into motes of light as they were sent back to the graveyard.

Everyone looked toward the center, spotting a golden horn

shimmering among the glow of the flames. Enthralled, they almost missed the pieces of equipment nearby.

A Demonified Lord was guaranteed to drop at least Sub Legendary-grade equipment. Even Legendary-grade equipment wouldn't be a rare sight.

Such equipment was undoubtedly of immense allure. But anyone who wanted to obtain them would have to stake their lives!

No one dared to approach while the flames raged wildly, lest they wished to throw their lives away!

The loot was so close, yet so far away.

It would be a while before the winner and the losers were determined.

Over on the other side of the battlefield, Nightbreak Trickster was momentarily distracted by the death of the Golden Dragon. But in that brief period of absent-mindedness, Nie Yan took action and closed in on him from behind with Dance of Death.

Nightbreak Trickster's heart shook when he felt the unmistakable tingle of a dagger mere inches from his neck. He cast Repel and clad himself in a suit of Ice Armour.

Nie Yan ducked to the side, evading the repelling force wave.

Ice Wall!

While a thick slab of ice rose up from the ground between him and Nie Yan, Nightbreak Trickster relied on his quick speed to retreat into the distance.

Nie Yan agilely leapt over the wall and dashed toward Nightbreak Trickster.

With Eyes of the Divine activated, the nearby Paladins moved to surround Nie Yan.

At the same time, Nightbreak Trickster waved his staff and prepared to fire an Ice Rupture at the rapidly approaching Nie Yan, only for his figure to flash before vanishing into thin air at the very last moment.

Target lost.

The instant his cast was interrupted, Nightbreak Trickster's pupils constricted as he felt a cold chill run down his spine.

Nie Yan's speed was unmatched. Regardless of how godly they were, without any crowd control magic like Repel at hand, any Mage that allowed a Thief like him to get this close would be resigned to death.

Nightbreak Trickster wanted to run, but it was too late. Nie Yan reappeared behind him like a phantom and struck him in the back of the head with Smothering Strike, then followed up with Cut Throat.

Blood sprayed into the air.

A large portion of Nie Yan's damage was absorbed by the Ice Armour. He would have to break it first if he wanted to kill Nightbreak Trickster.

Spells like Ice Armour weren't all that powerful under normal circumstances. But because Nightbreak Trickster's Magic Ignition increased the effectiveness of all Elementalist Magic by 300%, its defensive capabilities rose dramatically, making him as durable as the tankiest of Warriors.

“Quick! Save the boss!”

The nearby Priests and Paladins all cast their heals on Nightbreak Trickster as a curtain of gentle light descended on him.

Backstab! Eviscerate! Nie Yan's sharp attacks stabbed into Nightbreak Trickster's back, whereupon the Ice Armour finally shattered.

At this time, the Warriors and Paladins charged up to Nie Yan while a shower of spells whizzed toward him.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」He clenched his jaw through the intense barrage that depleted his health to only 20%, and drank an Intermediate Health Potion.

Assassinate!

Nie Yan plunged Splitting Edge deep into Nightbreak Trickster. Afterwards, he activated its innate skill—Blast! A powerful explosion of energy erupted forth, sending his opponent flying away like a ragdoll.

The Priests had no time to react!

Nightbreak Trickster landed on the ground with a thud, a single piece of equipment dropping from his corpse. But before Nie Yan could collect his spoils, a shower of magic rained down on him while the Warriors and Paladins moved in to surround him, leaving him with no choice but to retreat.

Nie Yan activated Shadow Waltz and disappeared from sight.

Several Warriors were about to charge forward, when they felt a slight breeze brush past them. Not a single player from Radiant Sacred Flame could prevent Nie Yan's escape. They were only left with the corpse of their guild leader, whom they slowly gathered around with disheartened expressions.

Seeing this scene, the guild leaders spectating in the distance

were frozen in shock. Nightbreak Trickster died, just like that? Even after putting on such a domineering display of power, he was still cut down like a dog in the end!

When they recalled Nie Yan's cruel smile atop the tree branch, each of them felt the blood in their veins run cold.

They searched for signs of Nie Yan, only to discover he had fled the scene long ago. While he was stealthed, he was akin to an invisible guillotine ready to drop down at a moment's notice, instilling a sense of soul-piercing dread in whoever crossed his path.

News of Nightbreak Trickster's death rang heavy in the hearts of the players of Radiant Sacred Flame spread across the battlefield, while Nie Yan's legend still stood tall. It appeared the might of Asskickers United was unshakable! Even their guild leader wasn't a match for the Mad Rogue! This was a huge blow to their morale.

At this moment, a group of players plowed through the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return to reach the center of Sinful Gorge.

“Boss, we're here!”

The players from Asskickers United finally arrived. All of them were branded with deep crimson names, frightening the various guilds in Sinful Gorge. No one dared to bar their path.



Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, Edgeless, Monochrome, and so on, many of these famous players were among the group. Even more shocking was that they all had blood-red names! Who knew how many kills were required to reach such a state? The very sight made everyone swallow their breath.

As soon as they showed up, they engaged the players of Victorious Return. It was a one-sided slaughter!

The surrounding guilds couldn't help but shudder in fear. The players from Asskickers United were simply too ferocious!

"How many players did we lose?" Nie Yan asked Undying Scoundrel.

"Around 600, but their deaths weren't in vain. We've taken out tens of thousands of players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, so far!"

Nie Yan looked over at his forces. Not a single player from Asskickers United wasn't branded with the PKer status. Even the Priests had red names. From this, it was clear they had killed no small number of players.

Nie Yan gazed over at the Golden Dragon's corpse.

The scramble for the drops was still going strong as not a single drop was successfully looted so far. The perimeter of dead bodies surrounding the Golden Dragon's corpse was growing ever higher,

even while the game was continuously despawning them. Anyone that got too close would be instantly obliterated by a dense bombardment of spells.

The situation sunk into a deadlock.

With more than a dozen guilds present, no side could obtain the Golden Dragon Horn or any of the other drops without being stopped by the others.

“No one has picked up the Golden Dragon Horn yet. What do we do? Five items dropped, the Golden Dragon Horn and four pieces of equipment that are at least Sub Legendary-grade! How about we clear the place out, then go for the loot after?” Sleepy Fox asked. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were beaten into a full retreat, so they had lost their main competitors. With only three of the major guilds still in play, if they were to combine their forces to carry out a full sweep, none of the second-rate guilds could hope to resist them. However, there were simply too many. Together these guilds could still put up a good fight.

“The cost of carrying out a full sweep is too high. It’s not worth it. We’ll be making enemies out of over a dozen guilds!” Nie Yan replied. The combined strength of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine hadn’t yet reached a point where they could annihilate all the other guilds in Calore.

“Then what do we do?” Sleepy Fox asked, gazing helplessly at the drops from the Golden Dragon. They were so close, but yet so far. This was extremely depressing.

“If we get the loot, I want the Golden Dragon Horn. The rest can be divided up evenly between you guys. But if there’s any Legendary equipment, it’ll go to the highest bidder. How does that sound?” Nie Yan proposed. It wasn’t like he didn’t have any methods. If he activated Adjudicator of God, he could easily snatch up the loot without a scratch. Even though it would be a slight waste, ten days was nothing compared to the Golden Dragon Horn and Sub Legendary or possibly even Legendary-grade equipment.

The Golden Dragon Horn itself was equivalent to a Legendary-grade item. Although he didn’t know the stats of the summon, it absolutely wouldn’t be weak! As for the other items, it was hard to say. However, anything Sub Legendary-grade wouldn’t be too terrible.

“You have a plan?” Fa Lan asked in surprise. With so many guilds covetously eyeing the drops, it would be extremely difficult not to earn the ire of everyone if they took everything for themselves.

“I do, actually.”

“If you have a way for us to obtain all the loot, I’m willing to agree to these terms,” Sleepy Fox replied. At least something was better than nothing.

“I as well,” Fa Lan echoed. This was a very easy choice to make. All the spoils would generally go to whoever obtained them. Nie Yan willing to share them was a show of consideration to their alliance. As for the Golden Dragon Horn belonging to him, neither

of them raised any objections.

It would be too outrageous if Nie Yan swallowed up everything himself. After all, Asskickers United hadn't participated in the battle against the Golden Dragon. Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine had put in most of the work and suffered considerable losses. If they weren't given fair compensation, no matter what excuse was provided, a crack would inevitably form in their alliance.

At times, a small sacrifice had to be made to obtain a larger profit!

## Chapter 271 – Golden Dragon Horn

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“Follow my instructions. Order all your Mages who have area-of-effect magic, especially those with the Fog spell, to target that place over there!” Nie Yan pointed at the location of the Golden Dragon Horn.

Sleepy Fox was slightly taken aback. Just what was Nie Yan planning? If they unloaded all their area-of-effect magic over that area, wouldn't they stand even less of a chance at snatching the loot? Even so, neither he nor Fa Lan had the slightest hesitation. They passed down Nie Yan's orders.

The Mages from Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine cast their area-of-effect spells as the magical energy in the atmosphere fluctuated violently. Fire and lightning fell from the sky, causing embers and sparks to fly in all directions, while a dense fog expanded outward.

The area surrounding the Golden Dragon's corpse was submerged in flames, lightning, and fog, shrouding the center from view.

None of the players from the second-tier guilds understood what was going on. But after seeing such a frantic bombardment of magic, all of them backed off in a scurry.

With the loot out of view, these players couldn't help feeling restless in their hearts.

Nie Yan stealthed and activated Adjudicator of God before dashing straight into the the fog of lightning and flames.

The raging flames and crackling lightning disappeared upon touching the barrier around Nie Yan, unable to harm him.

This was the magic immunity effect of Adjudicator of God!

Nie Yan's vision was greatly limited in the fog, occasionally blinded temporarily by flashes of light. He couldn't get a clear view of his surroundings. All he could do was go off his memory, stumbling his way through until he believed to be in the right spot, then crouching down to search.

He was pleasantly surprised when a golden shimmer caught his eye. This was the twinkle of an item drop! He reached out his hand and picked up what felt like a horn. It was slightly curved, and he could feel its rough texture.

It's the Golden Dragon Horn!

Nie Yan placed the Golden Dragon Horn in his bag and continued his search. After a while, he found all four pieces of equipment on top of some other item he couldn't identify. But there were quite a few of scattered about, and he didn't hesitate in taking everything.

Demonified Lords usually dropped a lot of items. This time, he had earned big.

After doing a second sweep to confirm he hadn't missed anything, he quickly made his way out. He didn't wish to risk dying by dallying until the duration of Adjudicator of God was almost up.

Nie Yan emerged from the dense fog and regrouped with Sleepy Fox and Fa Lan without attracting any unwanted attention.

"I've collected the loot," Nie Yan informed.

Sleepy Fox and Fa Lan wore incredulous expressions. They were still waiting to receive further instructions from Nie Yan. They believed he wouldn't take action until after the barrage of spells ended.

The bombardment of area-of-effect magic had never ceased, not even for a single second!

"I have a skill that grants immunity to magic," Nie Yan casually explained.

Sleepy Fox and Fa Lan finally understood why Nie Yan had asked them to order their Mages to cast area-of-effect magic. It was for the sake of cover, allowing him to secretly take away all the drops. Like this, they wouldn't attract everyone's ire.

"What dropped?" Sleepy Fox asked. Nie Yan had previously agreed to leave the four pieces of equipment for him and Fa Lan to divide up evenly.

Demonified Lords were guaranteed to drop at least Sub Legendary-grade equipment, after all!

“A Golden Dragon Horn, four pieces of Sub Legendary-grade equipment, and some miscellaneous items. As per our agreement, the equipment is yours. As for the other drops...” Nie Yan stared at his bag as he trailed off.

“Forget about that, just show us the equipment,” Sleepy Fox said impatiently. He was itching to see the properties of the four pieces of Sub Legendary-grade equipment.

Nie Yan couldn't help but inwardly snicker. If Sleepy Fox knew the value of these drops, he wouldn't have passed up on them. Anything that dropped from a Demonified Lord was bound to be good, including the miscellaneous items.

Fa Lan couldn't help but wryly smile. Sleepy Fox really was a bit too impatient. But since he had effectively been spoken for, he didn't raise the issue. Besides, two pieces of Sub Legendary-grade equipment was already extremely good. He had nothing to complain about.

Nie Yan shared the four pieces of equipment in chat. All of them were Level 40. One piece was for Warriors, two for Mages, and one for Paladins. Their properties weren't bad, roughly on par with his Blackbright Chestpiece.

With the equipment given to Sleepy Fox and Fa Lan, all sides



could be considered to have received their fair share.

Apart from the Golden Dragon Horn, Nie Yan also obtained 60 Golden Dragon Scales which was a crafting material. He could use them to create Legendary-grade equipment or enhance the defense and magic resistance of existing equipment. A single Dragon Scale was worth no less than a single piece of Sub Legendary-grade equipment!

Nie Yan examined the Golden Dragon Horn in his hand. Except for the gold colour, it greatly resembled a goat horn. It had a very coarse texture, and was covered with a delicate, veined pattern.

### Golden Dragon Horn (Legendary)

Requirements: 600 Strength, 30 Willpower

Description: This item allows the player to form a contract with a Golden Dragon.

Properties: Summon a Baby Golden Dragon. It has a chance of learning Dragon Magic when levelling up.

### Baby Golden Dragon

Level: 0

Attack: 32-33

Attack Speed: 21

Defense: 30

Strength: 30

Dexterity: 20

Intelligence: 2

Movement Speed: 22

Growth Rate: 15

Restrictions: Can only be used by a member of the Righteous Faction. Bound to owner.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's inventory.

The owner of the Golden Dragon Horn could summon a pet Baby Golden Dragon. This type of pet could level up. The Growth Rate determined the potential of the pet; 5 was ordinary, 10 was very rare, and 15 was heaven-defying.

A pet with a Growth Rate of 10 would generally be sold for upwards of 3,000 gold. As for those with a Growth Rate of 15, they usually couldn't be bought. If your Influence in Calore reached 50, you would be given the opportunity to buy such a pet. However, it was very expensive. Even 10,000 gold wasn't nearly enough.

Pets with an Innate Ability like the Baby Golden Dragon were even more expensive.

Levelling up a pet was an extremely time-consuming affair. Nie Yan decided he would think of a way to level it up later on.

Nie Yan recalled the Evolution Crystal in his bag. He wondered what would happen if he fed it to the Baby Golden Dragon.

He shifted his attention to the Golden Dragon Scales.

Golden Dragon Scale (Legendary Crafting Material): This item can be used to create Legendary-grade equipment. An Advanced Tailor can sew this item into a piece of armour to increase its defense by 20%, magic resistance by 30 points, and poison resistance by 30 points.

An item that boosted a piece of equipment's defensive capabilities by so much was very rare. After all, it was only a supplementary item. It would be a waste to use it on any gear lower than Sub Legendary-grade.

Nie Yan had 60 Golden Dragon Scales altogether. He planned to slowly use them as he needed.

He calculated his earnings. Despite not participating in the battle against the Golden Dragon, Asskickers United had still come out with the Golden Dragon Horn and 60 Golden Dragon Scales. This trip to Sinful Gorge was extremely worthwhile. As for Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine, they had over 500 players each die to the Golden Dragon. So at best, the Sub Legendary-grade equipment they obtained would make up for their losses.

The barrage of magic settled down and the fog cleared out. The

players from the second-rate guilds looked toward the center, only to discover it was completely empty. There was no trace of the Golden Dragon Horn or equipment.

“What the hell, is this a bug!?”

“Where did the Golden Dragon Horn go?”

The players were in an uproar and cursed up a storm.

The loot had vanished under everyone’s watch. How could they not feel unwilling?

Confused and puzzled, they momentarily stood in a daze. The Golden Dragon Horn and equipment were right there just a moment ago. There was no way someone could’ve snatched away the loot under the bombardment of spells, right?

Yet the drops had disappeared, leaving not even a single trace.

This was too depressing.

Could Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine have been the culprits behind the disappearance of the loot? After all, they were the ones who suddenly started bombarding the area around the Golden Dragon’s corpse for seemingly no reason.

However, the problem was that there was no proof! Not to

mention they were far weaker than Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine. Even if they wanted to make the accusation, none of them had the guts. All they could do was acquiesce.

“Over 200,000 players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame are heading towards Sinful Gorge!” a subordinate quietly informed the guild leader of Dark Hero.

The Dark Hero guild leader’s eyes widened in alarm. He quietly withdrew his forces from Sinful Gorge.

The second-rate guilds began withdrawing one after the other. They understood another huge battle was about to break out. In order to avoid being caught in the crossfire, they quickly left.

Guo Huai updated Nie Yan with a piece of important news. 200,000 players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had just arrived at the boundary of Sinful Gorge. They were just outside the passageway!

“This fast?” Nie Yan muttered in surprise. This vastly exceeded his expectations. He previously believed any signs of movement from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return would be immediately noticed and reported to him by Guo Huai. This was why he didn’t feel too anxious. However, it appeared they had somehow managed to stay under the radar.

## Chapter 272 – Sealed Off

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「Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame finally wisened up. Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster kept information under tight lock. None of our moles caught wind of them mobilizing their forces in other maps near Sinful Gorge. Many were even directly booted!」Guo Huai informed. It was too late by the time he noticed any movements.

It appeared Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were staking everything on this ambush. With such a large force flooding into Sinful Gorge, no matter how strong the players of Asskickers United were, they would still be smothered to death just the same!

Nightbreak Trickster and Heaven Breaker were finally pushed past their breaking points. After being surpressed and surpassed by the likes of Asskickers United, and to a lesser degree Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine, they couldn't sit back any longer. Today, they bared their teeth in an attempt to reverse their fortunes!

「How many of their players are entering Sinful Gorge?」Nie Yan inquired.

「Around 30,000, and even more will be arriving in a few minutes!」Guo Huai replied, a tinge of remorse in his tone. If only his information network were better, he could've given Nie Yan ample time to prepare.

Nie Yan scanned over the crowd of guild members. “Sparrow

Hawk, Scoundrel, Monochrome, Edgeless, Young Seven, Painted Muslin, Black Heaven... I want all of you to follow me!”

A total of 30 followed Nie Yan as he dashed toward the sole passageway in Sinful Gorge.

“Players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame are arriving at Sinful Gorge in droves. What do we do?” Sleepy Fox muttered somewhat anxiously. Like Guo Huai, he didn’t receive word from his spies until it was far too late.

Sleepy Fox was puzzled when he spotted Nie Yan leading a small group of players towards the passageway. What were they planning? That was where the enemy forces were located.

He never imagined Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame would be so efficient in mobilizing all their players towards Sinful Gorge. It was clear they had been planning this out for a long time.

「How many players do you and Fa Lan have left?」Nie Yan asked Sleepy Fox through voice chat.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had stationed close to 50,000 players in the maps neighbouring Sinful Gorge, while another 100,000 were on standby in various locations. Since each group received direct orders from their respective guild leader, all information channels were isolated. Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster had planned and prepared meticulously for a long time, employing all sorts of measures to prevent leaks. Thanks to this, they bought themselves a 10 odd minute window

where their actions would go unnoticed. Many things could be done in the game during that time. Almost 30,000 players were making their way through the passageway, while a large crowd had gathered outside the entrance. In a little over 20 minutes, more than 200,000 players would be crammed into the map. At that time, the only path leading outside would be sealed, along with the fates of the elites from Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine.

Nie Yan's initial plan was to seal off the passageway from the other side before the enemy could reach the valley. That way, the players in the passageway would be trapped, while those outside would be helpless to provide to aid. At that time, Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine could slowly chip away at the forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame, no matter how great their numbers.

But even a wise sage could make mistakes! He never expected the enemy to move so quickly! From his perspective, it was as though 30,000 players had emerged out of thin air!

「I still have about 8,000 players while Fa Lan has a little over 6,000,」Sleepy Fox replied. Both Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine were sending reinforcements to Sinful Gorge right this moment.

They were preparing to clash against the forces of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Nie Yan thought for a moment. Altogether they had roughly 15,000 players, all of whom were elites. Taking this into consideration, they still stood a fighting chance. At the very least,



the enemy would have to pay a hefty price in order to take them all down.

He led the group to a concealed cave close to the mouth of the passageway. It was pitch black inside, leading to who knew where, while a damp chill permeated the air.

“Boss, where are we going?” Undying Scoundrel asked.

“You’ll know in a moment,” Nie Yan replied. He knew the secret cave system in Sinful Gorge like the back of his hand.

The group traversed through many winding and twisting tunnels, advancing ever deeper into the cave, before arriving at a steep incline which they started to ascend. No one knew where Nie Yan was guiding them, but they had full faith in him and so didn’t raise any doubts.

In these narrow tunnels the group walked in pairs of two as they followed a passage that led to a cliff ledge. From there, they could get a clear view of the beautiful landscape of Sinful Gorge. It was a popular sightseeing destination in the previous timeline.

After traveling for a while, Nie Yan and the others finally saw light up ahead.

The brilliant rays pierced through the darkness of the cave.

When the group walked out of the cave, they were greeted by a

wide open view of the valley down below. They stood about 10 meters off the ground. Nearby were several similar cave exits, each with ledges that could fit around a dozen or so people.

A dense crowd of players were flooding into the valley. It was similar to watching a travelling colony of ants. The sheer number of people gathered in one place formed a spectacular sight to behold. A virtually endless sea of people filled the passageway from one side to the other.

Almost 60,000 players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were crowding into Sinful Gorge!

With such a large force arriving, the red-named players from Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine trapped in Sinful Gorge were faced with a calamity! Nie Yan had made a drastic oversight by underestimating how quickly the enemy could mobilize their forces. Had he been aware of this before, he would've stationed people to watch the passageway!

Nie Yan got careless after putting too much trust in Guo Huai's information network. He knew Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were eyeing an opportunity to get back at them, and he also knew Sinful Gorge was the perfect place for them to enact their revenge!

Nie Yan reflected on his lapse in judgement. He was still new to leading a guild, so some blunders were bound to occur eventually. The crucial part was not to repeat them, especially ones that were so elementary.

After reprimanding himself, he hardened himself for the upcoming battle. Even if he was defeated today, he would still try his hardest to take Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame to the cleaners!

“Boss, let’s ambush them!” Undying Scoundrel exclaimed. If they cast an area-of-effect spell over the large crowd, they could instantly take out 300 players at minimum. This sort of thrill was impossible to match!

“Scoundrel, cast Hellfire!” Nie Yan ordered. He was going to cut down a large swath of players in one go!

Undying Scoundrel waved his staff and started chanting the syllables for Hellfire, causing the magical energy in the atmosphere to stir. Red clouds rapidly condensed in the sky above the cliff ledge while a stifling pressure descended on the valley.

“Huh? Someone’s casting magic?”

“What the hell? Who’s casting, where?”

The players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were in an uproar as chaos spread through their ranks. They searched for a long time, only to discover no one among them was casting a spell!

“Over there!” someone pointed to a cliff ledge above them.

There, they spotted the silhouettes of a few people. Just how did they get all the way up there?

It was some 10 meters above the ground. How were they supposed to climb up?

The players could only look on helplessly as Undying Scoundrel cast Hellfire. After he finished chanting the last syllable, the blazing cloud trembled before flames rained down from the sky like a torrential downpour.

Numerous fireballs smashed into the cliff wall, sending debris and embers flying out in every direction. The valley was instantly transformed into a sea of flames. A blanket of damage values rose up into the sky as the raging inferno cleared out a large area, killing over 300 players.

The crowd was in shambles. A portion of them escaped into Sinful Gorge while the rest were cut off by the flames.

After a while, the flames slowly died down, leaving behind heaps of scorched corpses scattered all over the ground.

“Mages stay here. The rest of you, follow me. We’re going to drive those bastards away from Sinful Gorge!” Nie Yan said before jumping down the ledge. Monochrome, Edgeless, and the others followed after him.

The five Mages stayed on the cliff ledge. If any of the players who

entered Sinful Gorge tried to escape, they would be obliterated by area-of-effect spells.

Nie Yan immediately dashed toward the mouth of the passageway upon landing on the ground. As the blade of his dagger fell, he cut down several players in quick succession. They were all low-level cannon fodder, their equipment subpar, so he mowed through them with ease.

Closely behind him, Monochrome, Edgeless, and the others also charged into the fray.

Monochrome let out a deep battle cry and sent a Victorious Return player flying with a Heroic Strike. He plowed through another six players in quick succession with Charge, then took out eight more with a Whirling Slash. He left behind a trail of bodies in his wake.

Edgeless also went all out, cutting down player after player.

On another part of the battlefield, an unfamiliar Fighter was also performing remarkably. He was called Aloof Shadow, a newly recruited member of Asskickers United. He quickly rose up the ranks of the guild, distinguishing himself as a top talent. He used his heavy shield to steamroll through the players of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

Based on his actions, he wasn't the least bit inferior to Yi Yan while he was only slightly behind Bladelight in terms of skill.

Nie Yan felt gratified that some of the promising players were also showing growth! Asskickers United had gained another powerful Fighter!

Bladelight and the other Warriors fiercely pressed forward. Bolstered by the support of Young Seven, Painted Muslin, and the others who were supporting them from behind, they had no need to pay attention to their health. They advanced single-mindedly, overrunning the enemy at a frightening pace.

No one could stop them!

The Mages who stayed behind on the cliff ledge were worry-free since the only way to reach them was through the narrow tunnels. When facing an equal number of opponents, they were invincible!

Back in the passageway, Bladelight was especially eye-catching. No matter how many spells struck him, since they were only hitting in the single digits, his enormous health bar was barely getting scratched. It was like picking a hair from nine oxen. This was excluding the fact he had Priests constantly healing him from the rear. Clad in the Everlasting Dark Gold Set, he was an unstoppable killing machine.

# Chapter 273 – Declaration

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Nie Yan's group of 25 pushed the forces of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return back into the mouth of the passageway between the cliff walls.

Monochrome, Aloof Shadow, Edgeless, and the others sucked in a cold breath of air as they stared at the vast crowd up ahead stretching as far as the eye could see. Over 100,000 players gathered together, this was truly a breathtaking sight!

Even if Nie Yan's group were as domineering as the Golden Dragon, they would only be throwing their lives away by engaging the enemy head-on. They retreated into a narrow passage instead, where they stood their ground about eight meters from the entrance with weapons at the ready.

The ground of the passage was littered with the corpses of players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. They flooded in in an attempt to take down Nie Yan's group, only to quickly discover their efforts were futile. The frontline consisted of Bladelight, Yi Yan, Aloof Shadow, Monochrome, Edgeless, and a few other Warriors and Paladins; the backline was composed of a line of powerful Mages; and supporting all of them further in the rear were Young Seven, Painted Muslin, Black Heaven, Moon Child, and the other Priests.

A lineup like this was invincible, especially in the narrow confines of the passage! No one should even think about defeating them!

The forces of Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return were massive. However, their forces were stuck in the passageway, unable to advance even the slightest!

Nie Yan overflowed with heroic spirit while the rest of the group were filled with the desire to do battle.

Just the 25 of them were holding off over 100,000 players! What kind of magnificent sight was this!?

Any player from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return that arrived at this narrow passage would have no choice but to allow themselves to be obediently cut down!

“If any of you punks have any guts, then charge right in! I’ll let my blade do the speaking!” Monochrome laughed heartily as he taunted the players from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

“We’re right here, what are you waiting for? Suddenly feeling weak in the knees? Spineless? Weren’t you all supposed to be unbeatable? Bring out some of the attitude you guys always show after closing off entire maps to other players! I’m telling you lot, I’m from Asskickers United! If you ever bump into any members of my guild in the future, you better play filial like the bunch of grandsons you are!”

Due to Nie Yan’s influence, the group acted completely unbridled, showing not a hint of politeness in their speech.



The taunts echoed like thunder throughout the narrow passage allowing almost every player from Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return to hear them.

The players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were fuming with anger. They launched several more assaults at Nie Yan's group, only to be thoroughly beaten back each time. They suffered almost 600 casualties in the process. A force 100,000 strong was being held back by only 25 players from Asskickers United. They couldn't set a single step over the line drawn by Nie Yan. What kind of face did they have left to respond? Would they really be forced into retreat in such a humiliating fashion?

No matter how unbridled they normally were, they couldn't help but feel helpless right now.

What else did they have left to say? They had lost all face! A small group who refused to accept this situation organized around 500 players to launch another frontal assault on Nie Yan's group. However, they were soundly defeated. This 25-player blockade set up by Nie Yan was iron tight, enduring wave after wave of attacks without showing any signs of collapse.

Nie Yan walked up to the front of the group and scanned over the vast crowd of players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. He said, "I am the guild leader of Asskickers United, Nirvana Flame..."

Nie Yan's deep voice rang far through the passage. Hearing the name of the Mad Rogue, these players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame immediately settled down and looked over

in his direction. Many of them could only see a blurry silhouette standing over the corpses of their fallen comrades.

When Nie Yan's cold gaze swept over the players at the front of the crowd, all of them retreated a step.

At this moment, Nie Yan was like an untouchable god, a lofty aura that held the common people in contempt.

“On behalf of Asskickers United, I speak to you today, members of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. Withdraw! Scram back to Calore! If your guild is so determined to duke it out to the bitter end, be prepared to be completely and utterly crushed by Asskickers United!” Nie Yan said in a heavy tone. Asskickers United's formidable strength gave him ample lung power.

Nie Yan's words struck the hearts of every player from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. Only Nie Yan could make such a declaration. He would personally lead Asskickers United to wipe their names from the history books!

This was a declaration from all of Asskickers United!

It was filled with unrivalled contempt for Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame.

Over 100,000 players were prevented from entering the valley of Sinful Gorge by a mere 25 players. How could these players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame retort?

...

The Calore dungeons were filled with cell blocks. Outside of a few NPCs, many players from Victorious Return were locked up in these cells. These players were all thrown in here by Nie Yan.

Although the environment here wasn't bad at all, these players from Victorious Return were dispirited. They couldn't do anything while stuck imprisoned within these cells. As for just not logging into Conviction, they would end up feeling empty, as if something were missing in their life since the game had become an integral part of their daily routine.

Heaven Breaker was watching the videos sent by his subordinates with a gloomy expression. Listening to Nie Yan's declaration, he stood up in anger and slammed the wall. "Fuck that bastard! Who does he think he is, daring to boast about trampling Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!? Fuck!"

He was boiling with anger. He pounded the iron bars of the cell with his fists. If he wasn't locked up, he would personally lead a group of people to wipe out Nie Yan!

Fuming with rage, he ordered all the Victorious Return players in Sinful Gorge to wipe out the players of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine. This was Victorious Return's repressed anger!

Very soon, the around 60,000 players from Victorious Return

and Radiant Sacred Flame that managed to enter Sinful Gorge finished wiping out the players of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine. Only a small number managed to slip past them and escape. However, they also suffered heavy losses as over 30,000 of their players died. Over a third of them were killed by the 1,000 or so members of Asskickers United alone!

Asskickers United's might was truly stunning!

「Boss, what do we do about the people waiting outside Sinful Gorge?」a subordinate asked Heaven Breaker.

「Tell them to withdraw,」Heaven Breaker gloomily replied. After going through this battle, although Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame managed to wipe out Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine's forces, the losses they suffered in return were even larger.

However, Heaven Breaker had no choice but to go through with the battle. Based on the number of Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine players they killed, they would be compensated by Century Financial Group. Century Financial Group had already secretly acquired Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors. Their biggest rivals were Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were only stage props used to weaken their opposition. Even though they were well aware they were being exploited by Century Financial Group, Heaven Breaker and Nightbreak Trickster had no choice but to act this way, since the alternative was being swallowed up by Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine! It would be better to go out with a

fight!

The conflict in Sinful Gorge settled down, signaling the retreat of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. Nie Yan's group of 25 who were holding down a passage were an obstacle the players from Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame would be eternally unable to overcome!

After an entire day of ruckus, Sinful Gorge finally regained its calm.

News of the magnificent display by Nie Yan's group spread like wildfire through Asskickers United, then all of Calore.

The declaration Nie Yan made at the passage in Sinful Gorge shook the hearts of countless players. The once weak and small Asskickers United had undergone an astonishing rise to power! It was even starting a war to unify Calore!

Nie Yan returned to Calore with the members who weren't branded with a red name and received admiring stares from countless players. The 25 figures would forever be cemented into the minds of the players.

Kilnfire Woods, Twilight Forest, and now Sinful Gorge, Asskickers United had turned the tides over and over again, gaining a splendid victory each time.

Each victory brought the glory of Asskickers United up to an even

higher level!

Asskickers United once more became the focus of attention for the entire player base. This was a foreordained rise of a major power that would compete for dominance in the game, a holy land for countless experts!

Even if players couldn't join Asskickers United, they would be satisfied by just joining one of the branch guilds: Mages United, Warriors United, Priests United, Paladins United, and Thieves United.

All players came to the same conclusion in their minds: Calore would belong to Asskickers United and them alone!

The guild headquarters exploded with cheers the moment Nie Yan entered. Now upgraded to a Level 4 guild, the courtyard outside the headquarters could hold as much as several thousand players.

“Long live the guild leader! That declaration was awesome!”

“Long live Nirvana Flame! Crush Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!”

The players of Asskickers United roared with everything they could muster. The excitement from Nie Yan's declaration was still fresh in their memories. With him as their leader, Asskickers United created moment after moment of glory. The 25 that stood

their ground in the narrow passage would remain eternally engraved in the memories of every single guild member.

The passionate Asskickers United players brought a hint of a smile to Nie Yan's face. Back when he, Tang Yao, Guo Huai, Zhao Li, and Hao Cheng first got together to establish Asskickers United, could they have possibly imagined seeing something like today? A guild with just several hundred now soared to be one of several tens of thousands—one that assembled the strongest elites in all of Calore!

This was by far the most resounding statement made by Asskickers United to date. It was a declaration of war against two well-established powerhouses!

All of the players in Calore were shocked.

The rise of Asskickers United was impossible to stop. This was the birth of another hegemony!

## Chapter 274 – Dragonsoar Financial Group

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The guild was still in a frenzy, with everyone incessantly discussing the events that unfolded at Sinful Gorge.

Although Nie Yan's group had only succeeded by exploiting the winding terrain, such a paltry excuse couldn't cover up the immense humiliation suffered by Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return.

Nie Yan gathered the elite figures of his guild together in the headquarters to deal with the administrative affairs.

"What were our guild's losses like?" Nie Yan inquired, turning his head towards Guo Huai.

"They were in the acceptable range. 300 of our brothers managed to hole up in a cave and hold off their attackers. In addition to that, another hundred or so found hideouts and rode out the storm that way. We did loot tons of equipment, far more than what we lost. The only real losses were our players' levels, but luckily the Buried History patch made leveling up much easier. They'll be able to grind back up in no time," Guo Huai answered. Asskickers United could definitely afford these losses. After all, just killing so many Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return players already far outweighed any losses they suffered.

"What about Holy Empire and Sapphire Shrine?" Nie Yan asked. His allies' casualties were definitely not so light.



“Not many of their people survived, but such losses shouldn’t be too bad for them. Their foundations shouldn’t be shaken at all,” Guo Huai judged. A guild that went into an uncertain conflict like the one in Sinful Gorge would obviously know there was a high chance of failure. Major guilds like them had deep pockets and oceans of people. So what if a bunch of them died once?

“Properly compensate the players who died. We can’t let them lose out,” Nie Yan instructed. Fair and just post-battle arrangements were critical, leaving no one with reasons to complain. As for distributing the merit points everyone had earned, Nie Yan simply tasked Guo Huai with doling them out.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it covered,” Guo Huai promised. The current Asskickers United had quite a few administrative personnel. The guild’s ability to run smoothly was in no small part due to them. When divvying out rewards, the system would provide a lot of helpful data. Coupled with additional oversight from these managers, problems of unfair distribution rarely surfaced.

“Before I forget, you should also hand out the equipment prizes I promised,” Nie Yan added.

“That reminds me, there was something I had to tell you. While you were fighting in Sinful Gorge, some of our members came into conflict with Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors.”

“What was the result?”

“We lost over 200...”

Nie Yan’s heart sank. He thought for a bit before giving his verdict. “If you can get me their exact coordinates, report it immediately. If not, don’t worry about it. They’re not a threat to us for the time being, anyway.”

“I understand, but don’t brush them off. We’ve always been competing with Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return, and our losses haven’t been small. If we’re dragged down by our current rivals, the gap between us and those three will only increase. They’ve already started to take control of strongholds and they’re close to or already Rank 6 guilds. If we don’t develop faster, and they bring the fight to us, we’ll be the ones to suffer a loss.”

Nie Yan nodded solemnly, fully aware of the grim reality. Guo Huai’s thoughts weren’t alarmist paranoia, but the truth.

“I also heard Century Financial Group and the Kalon Fund teamed up to acquire 36% of Angel Corps. Even though that’s not a controlling share, it’s enough for Century Financial Group to have some say in their affairs,” Guo Huai reported. He was aware Nie Yan had some kind of conflict with Century Financial Group, so he thought his brother might be interested in this piece of news about them.

Angel Corps? Nie Yan was surprised. After Century Financial Group failed to purchase Radiant Sacred Flame, they had

withdrawn from Calore. Although he knew they were bound to invest somewhere else, he hadn't expected them to turn to the Satreen Empire.

The Angel Corps of the previous timeline was even stronger than Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame! Against this number one guild of the Righteous Faction, even at its peak Victorious Return couldn't hold a candle to them.

During its strongest hour, Angel Corps had in their ranks well over 30 players who stood at the very peaks of their respective classes. Below them was a veritable sea of experts, allowing them to hold an extravagant 526 strongholds! Their glory was in plain sight, for all to see.

Although Angel Corps was in the distant Satreen Empire, this new development sprouted a sense of danger in his heart. That was a monstrous behemoth!

With this distant foe added to the Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors in front of them, Asskickers United clearly had their work cut out for them.

"However strong Angel Corps is, they still can't just fly here willy-nilly." Guo Huai, noticing Nie Yan's troubled expression, tried to pacify him. At least until flying mounts became prevalent, Angel Corps had no way of sending troops into the Viridian Empire.

The Satreen Empire's beastmen used different classes and skills

from the humans of the Viridian Empire, so Nie Yan was now clueless as to how the future would unfold.

“Keep me updated on every move the Century Financial Group makes. No matter how small, I want to hear about it!” Nie Yan ordered firmly. He would never underestimate the Century Financial Group. But since they had shifted their focus to the Satreen Empire, Asskickers United finally had a little breathing room. After all, the two empires were so far apart that it would be a long time before their respective powers met.

After settling the guild affairs, Nie Yan received some information from Sleepy Fox.

「I was just told by the chief administrator of Calore that the stronghold battle will be pushed back by five days,」Sleepy Fox said. Even though Holy Empire had also suffered heavy losses, the stronghold battle was an absolute must for the growth of their guild. He didn't expect it to be delayed so suddenly.

「Were you given a reason why?」Nie Yan asked with a hint of a surprise.

「Apparently a Paladin from Radiant Sacred Flame received the position of Red Garbed Chaplain from the Holy Shrine, and requested for the stronghold battle to be postponed due to his ceremony. Chief Administrator Telus agreed,」Sleepy Fox replied. He didn't know what sort of significance this title held.

「Oh? So be it, we wait five days then,」Nie Yan replied. Red

Garbed Chaplain was a title granted by the Holy Shrine. It was somewhat inferior to his own Demon Hunter title, and was far from being comparable to a Grand Scholar. But since it signified a member of the Holy Shrine, it held a lot of sway in Calore. He didn't anticipate Nightbreak Trickster would take advantage of this development to postpone the stronghold battle.

「There's word going around that Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return don't dare to stir up trouble for us any longer. I guess those bastards finally learned their lesson,」Sleepy Fox added. The sudden delay of the stronghold battle wasn't enough to influence his mood. There was no harm in waiting a few days.

Nie Yan figured that the players from Asskickers United should take some time to recoup after going through such intense battles of late. After all, their enemies weren't merely limited to Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. If they wished to stay on top of things, they would have to properly allocate the time they were given from now until the start of the stronghold battles

He chatted awhile longer with Sleepy Fox about future matters before hanging up.

Nie Yan checked up on the Starry Night Potion Shop and Union of Assassins. Seeing that both were growing steadily, he felt reassured. The other virtual property he had bid on was the auction house to the north of Calore. So far, three of the four auction houses in the city were owned by him. As for who the remaining one belonged to, he wasn't privy on such details.

The day the real-world currency exchange went live was fast

approaching, and with this would inevitably follow sweeping changes to the entire game. Nie Yan had already finished his preparations. The large financial groups entering the playing field would definitely bring about changes to the future structure of Calore. The guilds that received their investments would undergo a brand new period of unprecedented growth.

“Nie Yan, Nie Yan, wait up!” Guo Huai ran up to Nie Yan in all haste.

“What is it?” Nie Yan asked. What sort of matter would make Guo Huai so nervous?

“Do you remember what I told you about the Dragonsoar Financial Group?”

“I do, what about it?” Nie Yan asked. Wasn’t it the financial group owned by Xie Yao’s grandfather?

“Dragonsoar Financial Group just contacted us and inquired about investing in our guild. I don’t know how to respond. What are your thoughts?” Guo Huai asked. The initial offering price given by Dragonsoar Financial Group was very alluring. By gaining such a strong backer, the future of Asskickers United was all but secured. This was an incredible opportunity for immense growth!

Dragonsoar Financial Group was an entity that rivalled the likes of Century Financial Group!

When Nie Yan previously declined the investment offer of Century Financial Group, Guo Huai felt a tinge of regret. Who could've known that just a few days later, they would be approached by Dragonsoar Financial Group. Those with quality goods would never lack buyers!

“What are their terms?”

“They want at minimum a 30% stake in the guild. If we're willing, they'd like to enter a 10-year cooperation agreement where they'll provide us continuous financial support and help us reach the peak! In addition to this, they want to dispatch a person over to supervise the affairs of the guild,” Guo Huai replied. Dragonsoar Financial Group's terms were extremely generous. This made him endlessly excited. If they signed into an agreement, Asskickers United's future was guaranteed to be bright.

“Let me think it over,” Nie Yan responded. Asskickers United was established single-handedly by him, so he had absolute shares. There was no harm in selling some shares off to Dragonsoar Financial Group. Since he, Guo Huai, Tang Yao, and Zhao Li would still own a majority stake, he wasn't worried about a hostile takeover. Besides, with Dragonsoar Financial Group's support, Asskickers United would be heading towards a glorious future.

There was also a faint indescribable feeling in Nie Yan's heart. If he accepted Dragonsoar Financial Group's investment, there would be another connection between him and Xie Yao.

“Start up negotiations. We're willing to sell 30% at most, nothing more. As for how much they're willing to invest, try to fight for as

much as possible. Draft up a contract for me to see,” Nie Yan ordered. Haggling in business wasn’t his strong point, so he would leave everything to Guo Huai. The final draft of the contract would have to go through him before it could be signed anyway.

Guo Huai became exhilarated after receiving Nie Yan’s approval. He immediately went about negotiating with Dragonsoar Financial Group.

This new development didn’t come as a surprise to Nie Yan. With the previous accomplishments of Asskickers United, even if Dragonsoar Financial Group didn’t show interest, other financial groups would definitely approach them. The only worry on his mind was the supervisor Dragonsoar Financial Group wished to send over.

I hope they won’t be too difficult...



## Chapter 275 – Father And Son

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Nie Yan checked the time. Seeing that the servers would shut down in roughly five minutes, he logged off.

When Nie Yan walked downstairs, he noticed his father and mother had already left for work. This was the usual scene he was greeted with in the morning. For the sake of the business, his parents would leave home at the crack of dawn and wouldn't return until late at night. Nevertheless, his family's circumstances were greatly improved. Furthermore, thanks to his parents offering them jobs, many close relatives and friends were able to break away from poverty. As for Luo Ming and the others, they were still stuck back in Ningjiang. Although they were far from barely scraping by, it was impossible for them to live as extravagantly as they did in the previous timeline. Without these vermin mucking things up, his parent's company would definitely expand with greater momentum

Nie Yan was awoken from his thoughts by the sound of his phone ringing.

「Nie Yan, what's this about you stirring up trouble on your first day of school?」Father Nie asked gravely. Even early into his twenties during the previous timeline, Nie Yan was still very much afraid of provoking his father's anger.

The reverence Nie Yan held for this stern father of his was marrow deep. Like many people, he wouldn't bat an eyelid in the face of a powerful adversary. But the moment his father raised his hand, he would scurry away like a timid mouse.

「I heard you seriously injured a classmate, and they have to stay in the hospital to recover for quite a few days.」

「It was a fair duel both of us agreed to. We bowed to each other and everything. We were responsible for own injuries. He even passed the entrance test for the Top Military Academy. How should I have known he would be so weak? I only gave him a single kick...」Nie Yan mumbled in a half-hearted attempt to justify himself. But in truth, Liu Rui really had been baited by him.

「Hmmp! You dare to talk back to me!？」Father Nie asked coldly.

Nie Yan instantly shut up. He had no intention of further inciting his father's anger.

「When that classmate of yours returns to school, I want you to apologize to him. Do you realize how big of a mess you've made? That kid is the son of an important shareholder in Dragonsoar Financial Group, one of the most powerful corporate entities in all of southern China!」

「Did they come to you looking for trouble?」Nie Yan asked, his eyes flickering with a cold glint. He wouldn't stand idly by if Liu Rui dared to go after his parents.

「No. Fortunately, the chairman of Dragonsoar Financial Group intervened on our behalf. Since the injuries were sustained during a fair match, the other side has no leg to stand on anyway. But don't let that be an excuse, I never want to see this happen again!

Think before you act!」Father Nie sharply admonished

「Yes, sir...」Nie Yan responded in a crestfallen manner.

Nie Yan hung up the call. He felt wronged, but there was nothing he could do. This matter gave him a lot to think about. Like in the game, he realized that solely relying on himself in reality wouldn't do as well. He required his own foundation. But where would he take his first step? His thoughts immediately shifted to Wei Kai. In the previous timeline, Wei Kai had done quite well for himself, albeit for a short stint, before he vanished without a trace. Wei Kai had previously contacted them about joining Asskickers United, but Nie Yan had instructed Tang Yao to delay giving an answer.

Nie Yan figured it was about time to have a chat with Wei Kai. He would decide what to do after school was over.

...

The layout and furnishing in the office of Nie Yan's parents looked elegant while the desk was covered in all sorts of documents.

Father Nie's frosty countenance immediately thawed as the corners of his lips cracked into a faint smile.

“What are you so happy about? You can barely keep that smile from plastering all over your face.” Mother Nie gently poured some coffee into his mug.

“You gave me a good son. That smelly brat beat up a classmate so badly they had to be hospitalized, on the first day of school no less!”

“You’re actually proud of this?” Mother Nie shot him an incredulous glance.

“It was a fair duel! Both sides are responsible for their own injuries. There’s no qualms about it. Like father, like son. That Liu Rui kid or whatever is the son of the second-ranked shareholder in the Dragonsoar Financial Group, Liu Ding. I heard he already passed the test for the Top Military Academy, but our son took him down with a single kick! Doesn’t that mean Lil’ Yan is even stronger than him? Our son’s entrance into the academy is cinched! How could I not be happy? This calls for some alcohol!” Father Nie heartily laughed. He felt gratified from the bottom of his heart. As for Nie Yan beating another classmate up, which youngster didn’t show off a little bravado by trying to prove themselves on the fighting stage? That was simply a matter of course!

“Lil’ Yan was too hot-headed this time. We’ve offended Liu Ding, won’t that be a problem?” Mother Nie asked in a worried tone.

“What’s done is done. Even if the sky falls, this old man will always shield him. If worst comes to worst, I’ll ask my old comrades for help. There’s no need to be afraid of Liu Ding, even less so after the chairman of Dragonsoar Financial Group himself spoke out,” Father Nie said brightly. He was a military veteran. He had experienced hails of bullets and people dying in front of his

eyes. This sort of trivial matter wasn't enough to cause him any concern.

Father Nie was a military man through and through. Mother Nie could only remain silent. Even though her husband was strict, not hesitating to give out a scolding or beating if their son misbehaved, he did truly love Nie Yan.

“Even though those two old comrades of yours are regional officers, they won't necessarily be willing to help you!” Mother Nie exclaimed. After such a long time, no matter how close the relationship, it had probably degraded.

“We went through life and death together. That kind of bond lasts a lifetime. If they were the types to turn their backs on a fellow comrade, I would've long since given them a good beating. Not only me, but Old Liu and Old Lin as well!” Father Nie retorted.

Although Mother Nie was deeply worried, after hearing her husband speak in such a way, she felt somewhat reassured. She grabbed her phone and called Nie Yan to remind him not to cause any more trouble at school. After all, he was attending a school for elites. Any random student there had at least some background!

...

Nie Yan wore a wry smile on his face when the phone call with his mother ended. Nevertheless, he couldn't help but feel a cold sweat after recalling his father's words. Liu Rui was actually the son of the second-ranked shareholder of the Dragonsoar Financial

Group. It was a wonder how that snobbish bastard concealed his background so well. In the previous timeline, Xie Yao had informed him that Liu Rui was very close with her family. It turned out they were all part of the Dragonsoar Financial Group! It appeared he had severely underestimated his opponent.

Even though that kick felt refreshing as hell, it wasn't worth provoking the hornet's nest. I really should act more carefully next time and not let my emotions get the better of me.

Since Nie Yan had created this mess, he should resolve it. He needed to start building up his own influence. Otherwise, he would be devoured without a trace. His best shot was to get a spot in the Top Military Academy's entrance exam. Very few people dared to lay hands on the students enrolled there.

Liu Rui would be staying in the hospital for a couple more days, so Nie Yan wouldn't be seeing him anytime soon.

When Nie Yan arrived in the classroom, there weren't many people there. Xie Yao was sitting at her desk, scribbling something. She looked very pretty in her pink, short-sleeved shirt and white skirt. Her hair was tied into a simple ponytail. She wasn't wearing any jewelry. Bathed in the light of the morning sun, she resembled an angel.

This beautiful deskmate of his was knitting her brows, pondering over who knew what. From Nie Yan's angle, her face was spotless and as white as jade while her appearance was picturesque.

Nie Yan sat down in his seat beside hers. As he gazed at Xie Yao from the side, he couldn't help but inwardly remark she was as beautiful as ever. He had very deep feelings for her, developed over two lifetimes. In the previous timeline, he only had the courage to sneak glances at her. In this one, he was a changed man.

"Xie Yao, good morning," Nie Yan greeted.

"Good morning!" Xie Yao turned her head and greeted back with a smile. As she stared at Nie Yan, she became somewhat absentminded, noticing there were some subtle differences between him and his alter-ego inside the game. She suddenly hatched a devious plot. She would use two different identities to get close to Nie Yan. In the end, when he found out those two people were one and the same, how would he react? She giggled sinisterly in her heart.

"It seems like we're having kickboxing class today," Nie Yan said after noticing Xie Yao was a bit distracted.

"Ah, yeah. There's still 20 minutes before class starts." Xie Yao snapped out of her daze.

Nie Yan recalled that Xie Yao was always the most energetic during kickboxing class. In the previous timeline, he was somewhat weaker than her. As a male, he should obviously be much stronger than her in brute strength. But back then, he didn't even dare to look at her directly, let alone fight her.

Class was about to start. Nie Yan was filled with anticipation. He

recalled how beautiful and heroic Xie Yao looked in her fighting uniform.

At this moment, Zhai Hao, Li Rui, and the others walked into the classroom. Spotting Nie Yan, they immediately went up to him in high spirits.

“Hey! I heard about what happened. You guys sure were awesome yesterday!” Zhai Hao exclaimed. He was absolutely dumbstruck when he heard about the events in Sinful Gorge. He was thoroughly impressed by Nie Yan. He had never met anyone more badass than him. The guild leader of Asskickers United, this was a legendary figure! The fact that the real, living person was standing right in front of him was still hard to believe. When he got up this morning, he had to pinch himself a few times just to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

Zhai Hao purposefully spoke in a vague manner so as not to reveal Nie Yan’s identity.

Li Rui and the others also greeted Nie Yan. Seeing Xie Yao sitting right beside him, they pulled Zhai Hao away.

Zhai Hao finally realized he was intruding and said, “Let’s talk another time.”

In those 20 minutes before class started, they would give Nie Yan and Xie Yao some alone time. They would chat with Nie Yan later during kickboxing class.



Each of them went to their respective seats.

A male classmate scooted up next to Zhai Hao and bragged, “Zhai Hao, I recently levelled up to Level 27 and also got myself a piece of Silver-grade equipment. Next time we log on, duel me?”

“I don’t want to PvP you.”

“Why not, chicken?”

“My ass, who would be afraid of you?”

“Care to make a bet?”

“If we’re gonna bet, let’s bet,” Zhai Hao replied indifferently. Fool, what’s so amazing about being Level 27. This elder bro will teach you a hard lesson in life about what happens to those who brag!

Overhearing their conversation, Nie Yan broke into a smile. In the previous timeline, he would often PvP with his classmates. He would even occasionally win a few things.

Nie Yan turned around, only to see Xie Yao had turned her head away. She was currently writing something on the computer. Sensing Nie Yan’s gaze, her beautiful eyelashes involuntarily jumped up, giving away the tremors in her heart.

## Chapter 276 – Seductress

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It wasn't often that Nie Yan got to have some alone time with Xie Yao, so he savoured every moment, making some small talk every now and then. He felt very content. Love was something that needed to be slowly nurtured. It couldn't be rushed.

"Class starts soon! Let's head over to the locker room to get changed," a student said after looking at the clock.

The students stood up and started streaming out of the door while they chatted.

Kickboxing class was being held in the gymnasium next door. It was quite large, covering around 600 square meters, and could hold hundreds of people. It was more than capable of accommodating the 30-odd-some students in their class.

There were many faces Nie Yan didn't recognize, some he was confident he hadn't even seen in his past life. In any case, the school gave its students a lot of freedom, allowing them to attend classes as they pleased. There were even those who would only show up during tests, choosing to spend their time working instead.

"Let's go together," Nie Yan suggested to Xie Yao.

"I still need to get changed. Let's meet in the gym," Xie Yao tactfully refused after a brief moment of hesitation.

She could just imagine what sort of commotion would erupt if the two of them were seen walking together.

As Xie Yao stood up, Nie Yan's eyes automatically followed her fine figure. With long slim legs and jade-white arms, she wasn't quite sexy-hot but rather exuded a curvaceous charm that invited endless fantasies. Especially with the suggestive words get changed still hanging in the air, Nie Yan's imagination went wild as he pictured the beautiful scene of Xie Yao undressing.

Xie Yao trembled when she sensed Nie Yan's half-teasing, half-admiring gaze. She felt a peculiar feeling in her heart. Did he have no intention of disguising his thoughts?

"I'll be going first!" Xie Yao exclaimed in a flustered manner. Her cheeks were slightly tinged with red.

Never before did she feel such a burning hot gaze from another male student she was close to.

Seeing Xie Yao's helpless appearance, Nie Yan cracked a faint smile.

"Mhmm, alright. See you in the gym," Nie Yan replied. The sweet fragrance of her perfume drifted up his nose.

As she headed out the door, Xie Yao noticed another female classmate, Jiang Yingyu, walking up to Nie Yan. She pouted

silently and paused, feeling a twinge of annoyance rise up within her. But, having just left in a fit, she couldn't possibly just turn around and head back! Huffing angrily, she marched out of the classroom.

“Hey! You're the new transfer student, right? How are you settling in?” Jiang Yingyu greeted with a bright smile.

Jiang Yingyu was a member of the cultural recreation committee. In terms of appearance alone, she was only slightly inferior to Xie Yao. However, since she was a seasoned dancer, she had a very flexible body on top of a flourishing figure. Best described as an alluring seductress, she was the subject of countless adolescent fantasies in the class.

A person like Jiang Yingyu would never take the initiative to seek him out for a conversation in his past life, so Nie Yan found her actions right now a bit baffling. It was rumoured she married a rich businessman more than twice her age after graduating from high school. At that time, many of the boys in their class mourned it as a huge pity. Just how amazing would it feel to push down a beauty like her in bed? They would even be willing to lose ten years of their lives for such an opportunity. Every last one of them cursed their luck that they weren't born several decades earlier.

Nie Yan felt no special feelings for a gold digger like Jiang Yingyu. Even back then, his heart had already been stolen by Xie Yao. Although he had spoken with Jiang Yingyu on several occasions in his past life, they were passing acquaintances at best.

“Pretty well. Everyone has been very kind and friendly,” Nie Yan

replied with a faint smile. The other side had taken the initiative to greet him, so he had no reason to treat her coldly. Besides, they were fellow classmates. It would be best if they got along.

Spotting Xie Yao walking out of the classroom from the corner of his eye, Nie Yan felt a twinge of disappointment.

“Hmm? It seems our class goddess has already left. You know, there’s so many pretty girls in our class. Why limit yourself to her? Look at Xia Ling, Zhong Xin, and the others, you could probably pick any of them up without much effort. I can’t say I’m not interested either,” Jiang Yingyu teased coquettishly after noticing Nie Yan glancing at the door. She purposefully leaned forward on his desk to give him a better view of her assets which were without a doubt unrivalled. Nie Yan was everything she was looking for in an ideal man: handsome, tall, strong, talented, and—most importantly—rich! She had originally set her sights on Liu Rui. Who would’ve thought someone even better would show up!

Nie Yan smiled in response but offered no further explanation. “You’ll have to excuse me. Class is starting soon, and I’ve got to get changed. I’ll be taking my leave now.”

“Oh, right... Let’s talk some other time.” Jiang Yingyu’s smile turned sluggish, a hint of embarrassment trailing in her voice.

Nie Yan stood up and strode out of the classroom.

Witnessing this scene from the other side of the classroom, Xia Ling couldn’t help but let out an audible snicker. That succubus

was finally served a taste of her own medicine. Despite having charmed an endless string of boys, she was flatly rejected this time around in the most embarrassing way possible. Who knew Nie Yan had such character? He actually possessed the willpower to resist her temptation!

Xia Ling's impression of Nie Yan improved even further. Hmm... I should tell Xie Yao about this.

Jiang Yingyu humphed unhappily, then turned around and walked away.

Nie Yan stepped out of the classroom. He was very much looking forward to kickboxing class since he would finally get the chance to exercise his body. Improving your own strength was a very satisfying feeling.

The gymnasium was across from the female changing area. Every student was provided with private changing rooms, fitted with various security features like interference with all recording devices. Xie Yao's room was roughly 60 square meters in size. Its walls were lined with rows upon rows of elegant cabinets that were filled with freshly washed and dried clothes. There was also a simple bed in the corner where the weary student could rest.

Xie Yao stepped into the changing room and closed the door behind her. She grabbed a kickboxing uniform from one of the cabinets and started undressing. She examined herself in the mirror. Wearing only a bra and a pair of pink panties, her slim figure was unstained by any blemishes while her chest was well-developed and plump.

I shouldn't lose out to Jiang Yingyu by much, right?

When Xie Yao recalled Nie Yan's burning gaze, a trace of annoyance and bashfulness arose in her heart. This peculiar sort of feeling was impossible to get rid of. She pursed her lips. That guy is definitely a pervert. I'll have to do a proper investigation to make sure nothing happened between them!

After giving this some thought, Xie Yao became a little anxious. She had no choice but to admit that Jiang Yingyu's figure was exceptional, enough to woo the hearts of countless men and make them go mad with lust, especially when she was dancing. Those seductive and alluring movements could instantly bewitch with a single glance.

Xie Yao changed into her uniform and bound her hair tightly. Her previously maiden-like appearance was nowhere to be found. In her white kickboxing uniform, she was brimming with valiant and youthful vigor.

After tightening the cloth belt around her waist, she was just about to walk out when her cellphone rang.

「Grandpa!」Xie Yao happily exclaimed.

「Yao Yao, remember that matter you asked me about earlier? Well, I've already put my subordinates on it. We're currently in the middle of negotiations,」Liu Hongze informed. He couldn't help but feel content from the bottom of his heart when he heard his

granddaughter's voice. Xie Yao always loved to cling to him when she was younger, so the two of them were very close. On top of this, she was his only granddaughter. How couldn't he love her dearly?

Thanks to his daughter being filial by giving birth to a granddaughter, even a lonely old man like him in his seventies could still feel a bit of familial affection. His love for Xie Yao was so great that he wouldn't even hesitate to gift her the moon and stars. When he passed away, all his assets would be passed down to her.

Although they were exceedingly wealthy, Xie Yao's family didn't consider money to be of much importance. After all, there were things money couldn't buy you, like love.

「Thank you, Grandpa!」

「Yao Yao, why did you want me to invest in Asskickers United so badly?」Liu Hongzhe asked affectionately.

「Uhh... it shows a lot of promise! How long ago was Asskickers United first established? Yet it's already grown so big! If our Dragonsoar Financial Group invests in them, aren't we guaranteed to make a huge profit?」Xie Yao replied in a fluster, afraid her grandfather would see through her.

「Is that really all there is to it...?」Liu Hongzhe meaningfully asked.



「Of course! It's only for the benefit of the company, nothing else! Investing in Asskickers United definitely isn't a mistake!」Xie Yao answered with a somewhat guilty conscience. Her cheeks burned hot when she recalled the actual reason.

Liu Hongzhe naturally saw through his granddaughter's lies, but he didn't question any further. Young people should be allowed to handle their own matters. Although Liu Ding's son wasn't bad, that wouldn't matter if Xie Yao didn't like him. If she liked someone else, he wouldn't interfere.

「This has nothing to do with our Dragonsoar Financial Group, I've decided to invest in Asskickers United personally,」Liu Hongzhe chuckled. He would be met with too much internal resistance if he tried to invest on behalf of the company. But if this was a personal project, no problems should occur.「As for the person supervising...」

「Let me do it,」Xie Yao blurted out.

「Alright, I'll let you go. I hope your future husband doesn't squander my precious granddaughter's dowry!」Liu Hongzhe teased.

「Grandpa!」Xie Yao bashfully stamped her feet. When she heard the word dowry, tremors surfaced in her heart.

「Alright, alright. I won't say anymore.」Liu Hongzhe laughed heartily. His normally dignified appearance completely melted away in front of his precious granddaughter.

「You definitely won't regret investing in Asskickers United! The virtual industry is currently expanding at a rapid pace. Add this to Conviction's popularity, and it's already become the number one destination for recreation! With it influencing so many people, the market definitely has a lot of potential for growth. Not to mention Asskickers United is currently the top guild in Calore. In the future, when they capture a few strongholds and start establishing places where people can sink their money, it will definitely become a gold mine. At that time, Grandpa, your pockets will definitely be overflowing!」Xie Yao exclaimed.

「What do you mean, pockets overflowing? Your grandpa is already one foot in the grave. As for Asskickers United, do as you please. So long as you don't break this old man's heart, everything will be okay.」Liu Hongzhe laughed brightly. He was confident Xie Yao could properly lead this little project. After all, she had learned many things over the years by following him. Even though it was only a guild in a virtual reality game, its management was roughly the same as running a company in the real world. This was a good opportunity for her to learn.

The two of them chatted for awhile about things in the family, with Xie Yao mostly concerned about Liu Hongzhe's health, before hanging up.

Xie Yao cheerfully walked out of her changing room. She couldn't wait to see Nie Yan's reaction once he realized she was the supervisor from the Dragonsoar Financial Group. Her face lit up with a mischievous grin. While he was still unaware of her identity, she had to thoroughly mess with him!

## Chapter 277 – Teacher’s Assistant

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Students gathered in groups of threes and fives inside the gym. By their sides, Yang Boyi guided their training. This teacher of Huahai Affiliated High School was the runner-up in the 70th kickboxing championships, a testament to his expertise and skill. Nie Yan was no less experienced skill-wise in kickboxing, but his physique was nowhere close to Yang Boyi’s be it in punching or kicking power. Of course, Nie Yan was still in the phase of training and growth. When his body reached maturity, his strength would easily reach a stage higher.

“Interested in a quick spar?” Yang Boyi asked after noticing Nie Yan’s arrival.

It was rumoured Nie Yan struck down Liu Rui with a single kick, but Yang Boyi hadn’t personally witnessed this. He wanted to test out Nie Yan, so he could get a general understanding of his student’s skill.

Teacher Yang was going to spar with Nie Yan? The nearby students immediately grew excited. Several classmates who were part of Liu Rui’s circle of friends were secretly delighted. They were confident Nie Yan would suffer a miserable loss. He might not even last more than several exchanges.

Nie Yan understood that Yang Boyi meant no harm. His teacher was simply doing his job, which among other things entailed understanding his students’ abilities.

“Please, guide me.” Nie Yan bowed.

Yang Boyi nodded slightly. Nie Yan left a good impression on him just from this show of manners.

Nie Yan and Yang Boyi faced off at the center of the gymnasium. After giving the standard salutation, they took up their stances.

Xie Yao who had changed into her white kickboxing uniform stood among the crowd of spectators. A flicker of astonishment crossed her face. With his resolute expression, Nie Yan didn't appear the least bit inferior to Yang Boyi. One had to know his opponent was someone who held a lot of clout in the kickboxing world! The runner-up in the 70th kickboxing championships was no joke!

Nie Yan took a deep breath; the man standing before him was absolutely one of the strongest he had ever faced!

“Come, I'll let you have the first move!” Yang Boyi said in a domineering tone.

“Understood,” Nie Yan replied. Without hesitation, he darted straight toward Yang Boyi.

The two exchanged blows back and forth, so quickly nearby observers could barely process what was happening. Nie Yan struck out with a side kick to the neck, but Yang Boyi raised his arm to parry. A loud impact rang out as the both of them retreated

several steps.

Yang Boyi was slightly taken aback by the force behind Nie Yan's kick. He previously believed half his strength would suffice, but he was actually forced to go all out.

This was already very impressive for a child who was still in a stage of growth, with plenty of room for improvement. Furthermore, Nie Yan's moves were fierce, and he already possessed the sense of a fighter. Yang Boyi felt passion ignite in his heart. He's an amazing talent! If trained well, he wouldn't even have any issues taking first in the kickboxing competition! He's just lacking in muscle right now...

The crowd watched the fight with widened eyes. For Nie Yan to have held out for this long was simply unbelievable. They had assumed he was only somewhat stronger than others their age. The vast majority of them only knew about fancy moves and the sort but nothing beyond that. Nie Yan's knowledge and ability had already far surpassed their superficial level. He was not merely a little bit stronger than Liu Rui.

Even Liu Rui and his friends were at a loss for words.

"You have plenty of spice and flair, but you're lacking in raw power and momentum," Yang Boyi judged after blocking an axe kick. He felt slightly apprehensive as his arm went a little numb. If this kick struck an average person in the chest, it would definitely break their ribs. Of course, it was still severely lacking when facing off against professional fighters.

Yang Boyi struck out with a kick to the chest. Nie Yan hurriedly raised both arms to block. With a loud bang, he was sent staggering five or six meters back before regaining his footing.

Nie Yan felt the air forced out of his lungs. The power behind that kick was truly fierce. It was worthy of someone who placed second in the kickboxing championships. Nie Yan would require at least another two years to reach that level of expertise. Although his recent growth was impressive, he was still far from matching those top professional athletes.

“But to have reached this level at your age is extremely impressive. Let’s stop here for today. We can spar again some other time,” Yang Boyi praised, then turned around to face the rest of the class. “When I’m not around, Nie Yan will be your instructor. If there’s something you’re having trouble with, you can consult him for advice.”

Yang Boyi had approved of Nie Yan’s strength.

“Nie Yan, follow me,” Yang Boyi instructed.

Nie Yan followed Yang Boyi to his office.

“Would you be interested in participating in fighting competitions?” Yang Boyi asked enthusiastically. “I can help you sign up. You should even be able to compete for the top spot!”

Nie Yan shook his head. “I’m still a student, I don’t believe I’m suitable for such tournaments.” He wasn’t interested in this sort of fame.

“You don’t want to compete?” Yang Boyi was surprised at first. But after some thinking, he realized all students of Huaihai Affiliated High School possessed at least some background. Why would they care about competing in a random kickboxing competition?

Nie Yan nodded.

Even so, Yang Boyi’s mood immediately deflated.

Seeing this, Nie Yan was about to say something to console him. After all, he felt Yang Boyi was truly a good teacher who cared dearly for his students.

Yang Boyi waved his hand. “It’s fine, go back. Help your fellow classmates. If there’s anything you don’t understand, you can look for me.”

Nie Yan returned to the gymnasium in high spirits. Yang Boyi had handed over the responsibility of instructing the class to him. He could take advantage of this position to spend more time with Xie Yao during class!

After the spar with Yang Boyi, all of Nie Yan’s classmates were convinced they weren’t his match. What else did they have left to

say? Some of them even took the initiative to seek him out for guidance. He patiently answered each of their questions one after another. Seeing how amiable and approachable he was, more of them were willing to approach him for help. Even though he was strong, he wasn't haughty like Liu Rui. He quickly won the approval of many of his classmates. As for Zhai Hao and the others, they had long since subconsciously become his followers.

None of these classmates possessed shallow backgrounds. It wasn't a bad idea to develop a good relationship with them.

These students benefited greatly from Nie Yan's guidance.

After a while, Nie Yan walked over to the female section.

"How are you guys doing?" Nie Yan greeted.

"Hello, Teacher's Assistant." Most of them reacted in a reserved, formal manner.

Nie Yan looked up ahead. Xie Yao was currently sparring with another female classmate.

It was pleasant to watch the female classmates spar, especially Xie Yao, as their lithe figures maneuvered about like a choreographed dance.

Noticing Nie Yan observing her, Xie Yao became distracted as her movements slightly faltered.



“Your movements need to be more precise. Put more power behind your strikes. Stay light-footed!” Nie Yan advised from the sidelines.

However, Xie Yao fumbled even more. She was caught off-guard by her opponent’s kick and fell to the ground.

Xie Yao got up and dusted herself off. She was inwardly fuming. Were it not for Nie Yan showing up, she would’ve never lost! She wanted to give him a piece of her mind. But when she searched around for him, he had conveniently made himself scarce. Hmph! You sure know how to run!

Nie Yan spent the entire day going around helping out the other students and socializing with them.

Seeing that the class was running smoothly in Nie Yan’s hands, Yang Boyi happily relaxed. He left everyone to their own devices during self-practice.

When the last bell finally rung in the afternoon, everyone changed back to their regular clothes and were preparing to leave.

Nie Yan had everyone gather around. All his classmates stared at him intently, wondering what kind of speech he was going to give to end the day off.

Nie Yan pretended to mull over what to say for half a day before

finally opening his mouth. “It was pleasant working with everyone today. Ummm... that’s all. Enjoy the rest of your day!”

“Tsk, here I thought you had something important to say. Don’t keep us waiting for so long over just a few words!”

“Teacher’s Assistant, goodbye!”

Everyone bid farewell, packed their bags, and got ready to leave.

Nie Yan approached Xie Yao and asked, “How about I send you off?”

Xie Yao hesitated for a long time before eventually nodding in agreement.

Nie Yan never thought Xie Yao would actually agree. An immense sense of happiness welled up inside of him. This was proof that Xie Yao had accepted him to some extent!

Xia Ling in the distance gave Xie Yao a teasing smile. She grabbed the rest of their friends and left.

Students walked in twos or threes along the tree-shaded walkway of the campus grounds. Some threw curious glances at two figures passing by. They never expected that the unattainable goddess, Xie Yao, would be seen walking together with a boy. If this news got out, who knew how many hearts would be broken?

The campus grounds were tranquil and peaceful.

As the two of them walked together, they would occasionally say a few words to break the silence. A subtle but intimate atmosphere developed between them.

It was the sort of feeling that made you wish this moment would last forever.

Nie Yan looked at Xie Yao whose figure was deeply carved into his heart. After experiencing two lives, it became all the more unforgettable. In his past life, he could only silently gaze at her from afar. But now, he could finally walk with her side by side.

When he recalled how depressed Xie Yao seemed during their reunions in the previous timeline, Nie Yan hoped to change her fate, under his protection of course!

In the blink of an eye, the two arrived at the pickup location in front of the school entrance. Xie Yao's family car was already waiting.

Xie Yao turned to Nie Yan and sweetly smiled. "Nie Yan, thank you."

Nie Yan fell into a daze for a brief moment. Even after two lifetimes, her smile never failed to enamour him.

“No problem,” Nie Yan replied. The time he spent together with Xie Yao caused his restless heart to turn unprecedentedly serene as all the noise and clamor of the past slowly melted away. Xie Yao’s smile was like the hint of dawn in an endless night.

“Nie Yan, today was fun.” Xie Yao waved goodbye before getting into the car.

Nie Yan waved back. Seeing the car disappearing around the corner of the street, he felt an inexplicable sense of loss. But beyond that, he felt boundless excitement for what the future would hold. He could sense the distance between him and Xie Yao slowly closing as they grew more and more intimate.

# Chapter 278 – Summoning the Golden Dragon

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During the evening, Nie Yan logged back into the game and started sifting through the updates sent over by Guo Huai.

The Credit Exchange had officially gone live! All kinds of items were being listed for sale, and an unprecedented spike in the trading of in-game gold and equipment occurred. But with both buyers and sellers deciding their own exchange rates, creating volatility in the market, it was temporarily impossible to get a firm grasp of things.

Several new types of establishments were introduced into the game. However, they couldn't be built yet. Some of them like virtual bars and inns could directly take real-world credits. After all, Conviction was simply a platform for them to provide a service. Others allowed the customer to receive their purchase in reality shortly after paying for it in the virtual world. This experience was somewhat similar to online shopping, but it was so much more! The customer could evaluate a perfect replica of a product in the virtual world, searching for defects and so on, before confirming their purchase.

Only a certain type of venue could host these businesses—strongholds!

Guilds would have to scramble for the next stronghold in order to establish a special district, where they could rent out the land and collect taxes. It was tantamount to moving the various businesses from reality into the virtual world.

This was a major innovation. People could assess the quality of a product before deciding on a purchase without having to step a foot outside the comfort of their homes.

The ingenuity and worth of a stronghold were on display for the world to see and enjoy.

In the previous timeline, a Basic Stronghold generated hundreds of thousands of credits and up to 1,000 gold in taxes every day. The gold was used to fund guild wars, while the credits would generally be distributed among loyal members who contributed to the guild's growth. The profit from a single stronghold was incapable of sustaining the expenditure of a guild war. However, as the number of strongholds under their control grew, the financial resources at a guild's disposal would rise exponentially. At the later stages of the game, the income of the guild would become quite substantial.

If Asskickers United genuinely wanted to expand, capturing a stronghold was crucial.

After the opening of the Currency Exchange, all 13 strongholds in Calore were released: 1 Super Stronghold, 1 Advanced Stronghold, 1 Intermediate Stronghold, and 10 Basic Strongholds. All of them were guarded by a great number of creatures of darkness. The respective strongholds would belong to whoever cleared out all these monsters. There was only one stronghold that wasn't under the control of creatures of darkness. In a couple of days, Radiant Sacred Flame and Holy Empire would engage in war to decide who may lay claim on this stronghold.

Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame quieted down since their defeat in Sinful Gorge. Asskickers United, Holy Empire, and Sapphire Shrine didn't wish to continue wasting resources and manpower fighting them either. They were all recovering in preparation to clear the new strongholds. Otherwise, if the other guilds snatched away those strongholds, their own growth would start lagging far behind.

When the battle for strongholds broke out, Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors would be the biggest threats to Asskickers United! Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame were currently slowly being pushed out of the ranks of the first-rate guilds.

Nie Yan looked over his recent gains. The three auction houses he had acquired were already beginning operations and business was flourishing. At this rate, they would generate around 1,000 gold every day. Nie Yan's daily gross profit for his other business ventures were staggering. The 11 branches of the Starry Night Potion Shop brought in around 700 gold, and his other businesses like the Alchemist Shop raked in roughly 200 gold. Finally, after he finished renting out the remaining 33 plots of land he owned across the various cities in the Viridian Empire, they would generate at least 300 gold.

These were merely conservative revenue projections. In the future, the money earned would only be more, not less.

The profit Nie Yan would receive in the future would be quite substantial.

At the moment, Nie Yan had a surplus of around 1,200 gold. He used some of it to restock the guild treasury, while another part was used to socket the equipment of some of his guild members with gems. All in all, it cost quite a pretty penny.

However, Nie Yan understood these were necessary investments if he wished to see his guild members ascend to the highest stage of the game.

After these guild members received their upgraded gear back from Nie Yan, they all went to level. The stronger they were, the higher the odds of clearing the strongholds.

Nie Yan walked into an empty workshop in the Starry Night Potion Shop and took out the Golden Dragon Horn from his bag. He drew blood on his finger with his dagger, then dripped the blood onto the Golden Dragon Horn.

Do you wish to summon the Golden Dragon? The summoned creature will be permanently bound to you.

Yes!

The Golden Dragon Horn immediately emitted a dazzling radiance, flooding the room with light. The magical energy in the room fluctuated violently while a powerful force emerged, causing space to tremble.



After a long time, the Golden Dragon Horn slowly dimmed before finally becoming completely inert.

Reading the system notification, it would take roughly 30 seconds to summon or unsummon a pet.

After Nie Yan finished the summon, a Golden Dragon appeared before him. It resembled a miniature of the one they faced off against in Sinful Gorge, and was only about the size of a penguin. The golden scales that covered its body emitted a dark lustre. Its belly was big and round, forcing the Golden Dragon to waddle as it moved around, while the wings on its back were practically non-existent.

The Golden Dragon spoke gibberish in the dragon language, somewhat resembling a whining child, causing Nie Yan to be baffled. Even though he was fluent in the dragon language, he didn't understand a word of what it was saying.

Before Nie Yan could move a single step, the Golden Dragon waddled toward him. As soon as he stopped moving, it would stop, too. After letting it remain motionless awhile longer, it used its stubby arms to hold its head and sat down. Nie Yan watched the Golden Dragon scratch its head, then randomly roll around the floor.

This chubby and funny miniature Golden Dragon was Nie Yan's pet.

Nie Yan checked the Golden Dragon’s stats.

Golden Dragon		Health: 100/100	
Level: 0 (0/3,000)		Growth Rate: 15	
Loyalty: 60/100			
<hr/>			
Strength	30		
Intelligence	2		
Dexterity	20		
<hr/>			
Att./Mag. Power:	32-33		
Defense :	30		
Att. Speed:	21		
Mov. Speed:	22		
<hr/>			
Innate Skill: Has a chance to learn Dragon Magic on every level up.			
Skills:: None			

If the Golden Dragon died, it could only be summoned again after 10 days, and furthermore, it would lose experience and its loyalty would drop. Loyalty could slowly be raised by regularly feeding it. Pet food could be bought at an NPC store.

The Golden Dragon was currently very weak. However, in the future, its strength would reach astonishing heights. The caveat was that levelling it up was very difficult. The experience required after every level increased exponentially. Getting the Golden Dragon to a high level was truly no simple matter.

Fortunately, the player could divert all the experience they obtained to their pet. Like this, levelling would become much faster.

Nie Yan took out the Evolution Crystal from his bag. He was going to use it to raise the Golden Dragon’s strength. This type of item was best used when the summoned pet was still an infant to bring out the greatest effect.

“Kuu! Kuu!” The Golden Dragon’s big round eyes stared intently at the Evolution Crystal in Nie Yan’s hands. Its gaze followed wherever he moved his hands.

Nie Yan placed the Evolution Crystal on the Golden Dragon’s head. Am I supposed to insert it in or something?

The Golden Dragon was so small that its head was roughly the same size as the Evolution Crystal.

Nie Yan felt helpless. He had never done something like this before. He had to admit he was a little reluctant.

He squatted down and gazed at the Golden Dragon, then teased, “Hey, Little Guy. What do we do? Am I going to insert this Evolution Crystal into your head, or are you going to swallow it?”

Nie Yan thought for a moment. If he couldn’t figure out how to use the Evolution Crystal, so be it. He didn’t want to end up accidentally killing his first pet.

Nie Yan gazed at the helpless look in the Golden Dragon’s eyes. He found its pitiful appearance slightly amusing. Even though a pet didn’t possess higher intelligence like humans, the system would still give it a basic level of comprehension.

The Golden Dragon suddenly opened its mouth wide and swallowed the Evolution Crystal. Nie Yan only saw a giant lump go down its throat, and with a gulping sound, it had swallowed the

entire thing whole.

“Shit! You actually swallowed it!” Nie Yan blurted out. He never thought the Golden Dragon would move so quickly. By the time he reacted, it was already too late. He glared at the little glutton.

The Golden Dragon sat down on the ground to rest as its full belly started making gurgling noises. It gently patted its belly and let out a satisfied burp. Before long, it had digested the Evolution Crystal and the little horn on its snout began to grow. Surprisingly, it was translucent like a crystal and emitted a bright radiance.

The Golden Dragon’s dark golden scales gained a brilliant lustre.

Nie Yan could clearly see that the Golden Dragon had grown by a stage. This was probably how the Evolution Crystal was used. Even though it was an accident, it was still a success!

Nie Yan looked over the Golden Dragon’s new stats.

Golden Dragon		Health: 120/120	
Level: 0 (0/3,000)		Growth Rate: 20	
Loyalty: 60/100			
Strength	33		
Intelligence	5		
Dexterity	22		
Att./Mag. Power:	38-43		
Defense :	37		
Att. Speed:	26		
Mov. Speed:	22		
Innate Skill: Has a chance to learn Dragon Magic on every level up.			
Skills:: None			

There was already a change in the Golden Dragon’s stats. Most

noticeable of all was the change in its Growth Rate. This was the most important part! Sacrificing a rare Evolution Crystal to create a one-of-a-kind pet was absolutely worth it!

A Growth Rate of 20, this was unheard of!

Although pets were introduced with the release of the Buried History expansion, not many players actually had them. In a group of tens of thousands of players, you would be lucky to find one with a pet. Furthermore, most of these pets had trash Growth Rates, and were incomparable to Nie Yan's Golden Dragon.

Golden Dragons didn't only appear around Calore. They would also spawn near other cities. This meant the guild leaders of other guilds would probably also obtain something similar.

However, even they most likely wouldn't have a pet enhanced by an Evolution Crystal.

No other pet in-game could hold a candle to Nie Yan's Golden Dragon!

Nie Yan unsummoned the Golden Dragon. He would attract too much attention by allowing it to walk beside him in the streets.

First things first. Let's find a place to level this little fellow up.

# Chapter 279 – Shadow Slaughter

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Everlasting City. Some of the richer members of Asskickers United were starting to show up. By pooling together their funds, they could afford enough Magic Bombs for a brief power-levelling session in the outer district. Due to the sky-high costs, levelling there for any extended period of time was impractical.

As the average level of the player base rose, the existence of Everlasting City would inevitably be revealed to the public. With this being the case, it was in the best interest of Asskickers United to take advantage of their monopoly while they still could.

Nie Yan found a relatively secluded area and summoned the Golden Dragon. He jumped into the settings and diverted all incoming experience to his pet. Afterwards, he fed it some steak and ordered it to stay put.

Dashing away, Nie Yan used his Cavalry Crossbow to aggro the several hundred Mechanical Golems in the vicinity. After he built up a large enough wave behind him, he began sweeping through with Magic Bombs.

「Boom! Boom! Boom!」A magical blaze enveloped the area.

Magic Bombs arced through the sky, one after the other, before falling to the ground and exploding as a blanket of damage values rose up into the air.

Swaths of Mechanical Golems collapsed to the ground.

Nie Yan saw the Golden Dragon's experience skyrocket as the special effect for levelling up played over and over again. It directly ascended to Level 9. Its health rose to 260 while its attack and magic power rose to 63-67, while all its other stats also rose considerably. Its growth rate was truly frightening. If the Golden Dragon kept growing in this fashion, its stats would far surpass Nie Yan's by the time it reached Level 23.

The Golden Dragon also acquired its first skill.

Dragon Breath (Junior): Spray out Dragon Breath, dealing (20 + Magic Power) Fire Damage in a 5-meter cone. Cooldown: 3 minutes. Ranks up at Level 20.

Dragon Breath was an outstanding area of effect skill. It was only Junior-rank for now, but it could already deal so much damage. If he brought the Golden Dragon's level up, clearing mobs would definitely become much easier. One Dragon Breath could scorch an entire area down to ashes.

Let's level here for now. I'll find a better place some other time.

Not just the Golden Dragon, Nie Yan also needed to level up. After the release of the Buried History expansion, the levels of players were skyrocketing. If he didn't quickly start levelling, he would soon be left behind. It would be ideal if he found a map with evil creatures. Like this, he could level up while also unlocking

some of the skills in his Glimpse of Darkness.

Nie Yan looked over the skills in Glimpse of Darkness before focusing his attention on a single one—Shadow Slaughter. To unlock this skill, he only needed to kill a single monster. But looks could be deceiving, as the monster he had to kill was a Level 50 Lord that was an evil creature.

Shadow Slaughter: While active, deal 30% splash damage to up to 10 targets in a 10 meter radius. Duration: 2 minutes. Cooldown: 2 days.

This was a skill any Thief would drool over.

Area-of-effect Thief skills were extremely rare. Even if one showed up in the marketplace, its price would be staggering.

What Nie Yan currently lacked was precisely this type of skill. With such a skill in his arsenal, whether in PvP or PvE, it would be extremely useful. The only downside was its fairly long cooldown.

An increasing number of players obtained new high level skills every day. If Nie Yan wanted to maintain his superiority, it was imperative for him to raise the quality of his skills.

Nie Yan had his sights set on a new goal. He glanced at the Golden Dragon beside him. I'll get this guy up to at least Level 20



first.

Nie Yan noticed the Golden Dragon had grown quite a bit. It now reached up to his waist. He wondered how big it would get in the future. Would it grow as large as the one in Sinful Gorge? If that happened, it would be too frightening.

Nie Yan dashed off to aggro another 500 Mechanical Golems. After rounding them up, he cleared them away with Magic Bombs.

Another wave of Mechanical Golems collapsed to the ground, and the Golden Dragon ascended to Level 13. The higher its level, the more experience it needed to level up.

Nie Yan did some calculations. The Golden Dragon required at least three times as much experience to level up compared to him. If he wanted to bring it up to a truly high level, it would be no simple matter. If he wished to keep the Golden Dragon's level close to his own, he would be forced to put endlessly more effort into levelling than the average player.

Far off in a secluded corner, the Golden Dragon was wriggling about, bored to death.

Because Nie Yan ordered it to stay put, it couldn't leave.

At its current level, there was no way it could handle the Mechanical Golems.

As Nie Yan started collecting the loot, an ash-gray skill book beside the corpse of a Mechanical Golem caught his eye. He bent down and picked it up.

Skill books dropping wasn't all that rare, so Nie Yan wasn't too surprised. But after reading the name, a flash of joy crossed his face.

Gale Step (Junior): Become invincible for the first 3 seconds after entering stealth. Movement Speed +20%. Stealth Effect -60%. Cooldown: 3 minutes. Requirement: Level 20. Ranks up at 500 Dexterity.

Gale Step was an essential skill for all Thieves. The boost to movement speed while in stealth, and especially the 3 seconds of invincibility, would allow the player to evade many dangers. It was a rare skill book that was highly sought after. The only downside was that the player's ability to stealth would be greatly reduced, allowing enemies to more easily spot them.

If the player reached 500 Dexterity, it would upgrade to Intermediate-rank, and its effects would be greatly enhanced.

Since Gale Step was an essential skill, it could be found in any map above Level 20. However, its drop rate was extremely low. It was still pretty rare in Level 30-40 maps and only started to become more common in maps over Level 60.

In the previous timeline, Gale Step was one of Nie Yan's bread and butter skills. Having gone without it until now truly felt a bit uncomfortable.

Nie Yan was filled with incomparable joy now that he had Gale Step back at hand. Although Shadow Waltz was a decent skill, it just wasn't Gale Step.

Nie Yan learned Gale Step as a new skill icon popped into his skill bar. This sort of feeling was indescribable. It was as though a missing piece of his soul had been restored. He could easily use this skill with the highest mastery.

Apart from the skill book, Nie Yan also accumulated a giant pile of equipment, all of which were Level 40. However, since the Mechanical Golems were all ordinary mobs, their quality wasn't that great, averaging around White and Bronze-grade.

Nevertheless, even though he didn't need this equipment, the guild was in dire need of it. The ordinary members generally couldn't afford to wear high quality equipment right after breaking a level milestone, so they could only settle for White and Bronze-grade equipment as they transitioned.

Nie Yan did a breakdown of all the loot. He noticed he had two pieces of equipment from the Everlasting Silver Set. His luck wasn't bad. If he sold a full Everlasting Silver Set for 700 gold, it would almost completely cover his expenditure. The Everlasting Silver Set Sleepy Fox bought had already been delivered by Guo Huai, causing Sapphire Shrine to feel like they had been left behind. So they also asked to purchase an Everlasting Silver Set. If

he sold two, that would be an easy 1,400 gold.

The number of Asskickers United players levelling in Everlasting City had increased substantially, so naturally the number of Everlasting Silver Set pieces dropping rose as well. They currently had a total of seven sets in their guild. Bladelight wore the Everlasting Dark Gold Set, both Yi Han and Lofty Shadow had an Everlasting Gold Set, and the remaining four Everlasting Silver Sets were given to relatively outstanding Fighters. So far, Asskickers United had 7 Fighters that made up an impregnable wall!

The number of quality Fighters in a guild was closely connected to its future!

Nie Yan placed the two pieces of equipment into his bag. Let's see if I can get a few more to drop.

After grinding for another 2 hours, he had finally gotten the Golden Dragon up to Level 20. It was already as tall as him. Looking at its stats, it had 550 health, 380-393 attack and magic power, and its other stats also saw substantial growth.

Its stats growth every level up wasn't fixed. The higher its level, the more stats it would gain. At its current level, the Golden Dragon could already fend for itself.

It had also learned two new skills:



Haste Aura (Junior): Increase the movement speed of allies within a 20 meter radius by 5%. Ranks up at Level 30.

Sharp Scales (Junior): Reflect 5% of all physical damage received back at the enemy. Ranks up at Level 30.

Haste Aura was a passive skill. It was always active and didn't expend any mana. It was an amazing skill, especially at the higher ranks. Even though the speed bonus was small, it was still significant considering it affected all allies within the aura's influence.

Nie Yan recalled a player who obtained a pet with a high-ranking thorns skill in the previous timeline. They started crazily increasing the pet's tankiness, using all sorts of methods to raise its health and defense. The end result was a valiant, walking fortress. It was a Level 180 pet with over 80,000 health. Anyone who attacked it would die miserably from having their attacks reflected back at them. It also excelled at PvE as monster corpses would pile up from where it stood as they killed themselves attacking it. During group battles, no melee-based class would be crazy enough to attack it.

All thorns skills when brought up to a high rank would be terrifying.

Finally, Dragon Breath had upgraded to Intermediate-rank.

Dragon Breath (Intermediate): Spray out Dragon Breath, dealing  $(100 + \text{Magic Power})$  Fire Damage in a 5-meter cone. Cooldown: 2 minutes. Ranks up at Level 60.

After rising to Intermediate-rank, Dragon Breath was greatly enhanced.

Nie Yan could feel the Golden Dragon's rapid growth. At its current state, it could take on 2 or 3 Level 26 monsters at once without a problem.

## Chapter 280 – Black Sea Devil Banmu

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Seeing that Lil' Gold had finally reached Level 20, Nie Yan unsummoned him and departed from Everlasting City.

It's about time I unlock the Shadow Slaughter skill from the Glimpse of Darkness!

Nie Yan headed east on horseback, toward the Endless Sea. The tall grass and the wide open plains blurred past him as he galloped through. He occasionally came across a party or two, players who were in the middle of leveling. The mere sight of his Faulkner Warhorse charging towards them sent these players into a flurry of fright and panic. They would fall into defensive formations to repel this mysterious and fearsome enemy, only to discover that he had long since charged right through them and disappeared into the horizon.

The Glimpse of Darkness was extraordinary. But much of its potential still remained untapped, such as the skill tree with over several dozen different skills. Six or seven belonged in the Shadow category alone. Shadow Slaughter was but one of them.

Nie Yan finally arrived at a cliff edge. Ahead of him was a vast body of water, stretching out as far as the eye could see.

The clear sky and blue waters gave for a relaxing sight. He spotted some seabirds flying through the air, which added a scenic touch to the overall view.

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You have discovered the Endless Sea.

Nie Yan galloped along the shore edge for about ten or so minutes. Thankfully, he didn't encounter any monsters during this time. After all, this was a level 50 zone!

Although the monsters in the outer regions of the Endless Sea were already quite terrifying, those who dared to dive into the depths of the core region would find themselves faced with creatures with levels in the several hundreds! Of course, a high-grade underwater-breathing potion or skill was required to reach such locations.

Nie Yan arrived at the top of a cliff and looked down. It was about a hundred meter drop to a shallow cove below. The waters were murky black as if they had been contaminated with ink.

Not far from the base of the cliff were three flat rocky islands that stood about 30 meters above the water's surface. They could hold about 60 people altogether.

A creature called Black Sea Devil Banmu occupied this cove. It was one of the few Level 50 named Lords among Sea-type monsters. It was incredibly difficult to deal with, but its drops were phenomenal. It also possessed ranged attacks. Only a team full of Level 50+ players would stand a chance at defeating this boss.



Players would generally use an item with the Featherfall ability to land safely on one of the rocky islands, so they could fight the boss on solid ground.

Nie Yan scanned the cliff wall below before locking his gaze on a small crack in the distance. It was about 50 meters above the water's surface. At this distance, Banmu's tentacles wouldn't reach, but its ranged attacks would still pose an immense threat.

He leapt off the cliff toward one of the rocky islands, the smell of sea salt rushing into his nostrils as the air brushed past his face.

Just as Nie Yan was about to go splat, he activated the Featherfall Jewel and his falling speed slowed to a crawl. He landed gently on one of the rocky islands.

Nie Yan looked down at the murky waters below. He could detect an enormous creature lurking in the depths.

「Caw! Caw! Caw!」Nie Yan looked up at the sky and spotted a flock of large seabirds flying overhead, just as a jet of black liquid shot out over 60 meters into the air and struck one of the birds. It let out a miserable squawk, falling listlessly into the waters below.

Nie Yan felt slightly apprehensive about his odds since he had never attempted such a risky feat before. It was rumoured in the previous timeline that a Thief had single-handedly defeated Banmu by taking advantage of an item called the Levitation Ring. Unfortunately, he didn't own it. But even so, he had done his research. The boss' tentacles had a reach of about 30 meters. As for

its ranged attacks, they would put his reaction time to the test! If he reacted in time, he could dodge them.

He had previously seen videos of players fighting Banmu, so he had that much of an impression of the boss at least.

Nie Yan only dared to come here because others had accomplished defeating the boss alone in the previous timeline. If he was forced to walk an untrodden path, who knew how many times he would have to die before finally succeeding.

He was ready to give it a go. If he defeated the boss, he would unlock the Shadow Slaughter skill on top of receiving several pieces of high-quality equipment!

Black Sea Devil Banmu took three days to respawn.

If he succeeded on his first try, he could come here to farm it regularly in the future.

Nie Yan summoned Lil' Gold and hid him in a well-concealed spot where Banmu's attacks couldn't reach.

He activated the Crawler Ring and started nimbly ascending the cliff face.

Nie Yan was quite accustomed to using the Crawler Ring by now. He climbed over 10 meters in no time. After retrieving his Cavalry Crossbow, he shot at the waters below.「Whoosh! Whoosh!

Whoosh!」Five bolts flew out in a straight line and struck the water's surface, creating small splashes.

The water trembled before great waves rose and a giant kraken-like creature broke through the surface.

Nie Yan quickly began climbing higher. After reaching an elevation of about 50 meters, he found some shrubbery growing out of the cliff wall to stand on, then turned around and shot at the creature down below.

「Put! Put! Put!」Five bolts struck the target in quick succession, causing damage values to float up into the air.

-50

-100

-51

-53

-100

Although Banmu was a Level 50 Lord, it didn't have any armour plating to protect its body like Machine-type monsters, so the Piercing Damage of Nie Yan's Cavalry Crossbow was extremely effective. There was also the additional 100 Fire Damage.

Seeing the Cavalry Crossbow's damage, Nie Yan felt a little relaxed. With such potent firepower, it was possible to slowly grind down Banmu's health bar.

Nie Yan could finally make out Banmu's appearance.

It was a massive, pitch black meatball floating just above the water's surface, resembling a hill with countless tentacles extending outward. As soon as it spotted Nie Yan, it sent a tentacle lashing towards him.

「Boom!」That thick and solid tentacle slammed into the cliff face.

But with an attack range of only 30 meters, it couldn't even scratch Nie Yan who was over 50 meters above the water. Due to him being at a higher elevation, his attacks also gained additional range, so he could even further increase the distance between them.

Nie Yan inspected Banmu with Transcendent Insight.

Black Sea Devil Banmu (Lord): Level 50

Health: 99,301/100,000

Far from having super-high health or an impenetrable defense, what made Banmu the 6th most dangerous Level 50 Lord in the game was its terrifying attack power. It possessed an extremely deadly skill which could kill a player instantly by wrapping them up with its tentacles and flinging them away. Even Fighters were no exception. With the tank gone, the rest of the team was doomed for failure.

Its health regeneration wasn't all that high, but its tentacle attacks also possessed a life draining effect. Any damage it dealt to players would directly restore a portion of its own health.

Fortunately, Nie Yan was outside the range of these frightening tentacles, so none of that was of concern to him. The only thing he had to worry about was dodging its Toxin Jet skill which contained a highly-potent poison that could easily kill a player.

For these reasons, Nie Yan selected Banmu out of the numerous Level 50 Lords. It was the only one he could handle at his current level!

Hanging off the cliff face, Nie Yan shot out a steady stream of bolts at Banmu as a continuous line of damage values floated up into the air.

The amount of damage Nie Yan dealt every second barely surpassed Banmu's health regeneration. Nevertheless, its health was being slowly chipped away.

Banmu furiously lashed its tentacles at the cliff face. However, Nie Yan was far out of its range, so none of its attacks connected. It was resigned to passively take a beating.

Nie Yan continuously fired his Cavalry Crossbow from the cliff face.

At this moment, Banmu's eyes which were as large as saucer plates flashed, and it shot out a jet of viscous black liquid.

Seeing Banmu's eyes flash, Nie Yan shot out a web line from his Silk Spinner Ring and swung away to a different patch of shrubbery nearby.

The vicious black jet struck his previous position and splashed out in all directions. It let out a sizzling noise as smoke arose.

It was a successful dodge!

Banmu's Toxic Jet skill had a one minute cooldown while Nie Yan's Silk Spinner Ring had a 20 second cooldown. This meant he could dodge these attacks indefinitely.

After successfully dodging, Nie Yan found the last missing piece of confidence. He fired a continuous volley of bolts at Banmu.

Nie Yan slowly wore away at Banmu's health. With nothing to do, Lil' Gold was sleeping soundly in his hiding spot on one of the rocky islands below.

Slowly, seconds turned into minutes.

During this time, Nie Yan received a call from Yao Yao asking if he was free to help her with the Karsi's Blessing quest. Since he was currently busy dealing with Banmu, he had to slightly push this back.

「I did a bit of research and found some information related to Karsi's Blessing. Do you want me to send it over?」Yao Yao asked. For the sake of clearing this quest, she had made ample preparations.

「Sure, why not? So, what do you need to collect to complete this quest?」Nie Yan inquired. Each quest that Karsi handed out would differ slightly from one another. The first was always a collection quest, however. The higher the player's level during the time they received the quest, the more difficult the item they would be tasked to retrieve. After handing the requested item over, the player would go through a trial. It was at this stage Nie Yan knew of a special method that allowed Yao Yao to pass through more easily.

「I need to collect a Black Sin Lotus,」Yao Yao replied. This item could be found in the depths of Sinful Gorge. She was pleasantly surprised. It was evident that Nie Yan was familiar with the Karsi's Blessing questline. Otherwise, he wouldn't have known she had to collect something.

「Black Sin Lotus?」Nie Yan asked with a hint of surprise. Obtaining this item posed quite the challenge. Ordinary players would have to form a large party to have a chance of gathering just one.

「Is it that hard to find? If it's too difficult, just forget it,」Yao Yao said in a slightly disappointed tone.

「No, it's fine. Let me take a look at the information you sent over first,」Nie Yan replied. He only knew some general advice and tricks to help make clearing the quest easier. He wasn't too knowledgeable about the specifics.



# Chapter 281 – Karsi's Teachings

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【Karsi's Blessing】Background Information: Karsi was born to a poor household with a deformed left hand. Unable to hold a staff, he was deemed incapable of learning magic. However, since childhood he dreamed of becoming a renowned Holy Mage. And so, after experiencing countless failures and tribulations he finally learned—through sheer willpower and perseverance—how to wield a staff, and cast his first spell with only four fingers. Roughly 80 years later, he developed a miraculous Life Magic and became one of the scant few Holy Mages to gain eternal life. He was granted the illustrious position of Grand Archbishop by the Holy Shrine.

Karsi's Teachings: Only by enduring through suffering will a person truly thrive. Some will taste the final joys and sorrows of life. Others are fated to be buried beneath cold-hard gravestones. Hero! Be grateful of the trials bestowed to you by the heavens, for the path to glory is paved with hardship!

Nie Yan's heart quivered as these words resonated with him. He recalled the hardships of his past life, the bankruptcy of his family and the death of his parents; it felt as if it were but a hazy dream. Yet it was precisely these experiences that made him the person he was today.

Time washed away his muddle-headedness and inferiority complex. His spirit slowly settled, and his mind gained inner purity.

Karsi's life resembled the rebirth of a phoenix. It ultimately led

him to gain immortality as well as his current fame.

As he read deeper into the background information, Nie Yan found that Karsi had received the blessing of the Ten Holy Paladins. He even participated in the war against the dragon race! Since the start of that ancient era, he had lived all the way to the present. This was a legendary figure!

With Karsi's power and experiences, he was fully qualified to be a Cardinal. Yet he was content with his title of Grand Archbishop.

Nie Yan revealed a look of excitement and expectation. Maybe I can find some clues about the Ten Holy Paladins from Karsi!

To think that someone who lived through that era was still alive today. It was next to impossible to meet such a person. He absolutely wouldn't let go of this opportunity!

Nie Yan's heart filled with burning anticipation.

The Ten Holy Paladins were some of the most famous figures of the ancient era!

They led the resistance against the dragon race, and an archangel even graced them with a visit!

Back then, the Glennin province encompassed the northern part of the Viridian Empire, the western part of the Satreen Empire, and the current Geliro Barrens. Its total size was roughly half that

of the Viridian Empire. The influence of the Ten Holy Paladins spread that far!

Just what sort of riches would await him if he dug up all the clues related to them? For now, Nie Yan could hardly imagine. However, any reward related to such a crucial part of the game's lore couldn't be small!

Although Nie Yan possessed two lifetimes' worth of game experience, this was his first time delving into unexplored lore. He had experienced many firsts in this life, such as this Legend of the Ten Holy Paladins quest line.

Nie Yan continued reading. It appeared Karsi had participated in every important military campaign. He had interacted with the Ten Holy Paladins regularly. He could even be described as one of the people closest to them.

If I meet with Karsi, perhaps he'll have some information that can help me!

After looking through all the information, Nie Yan chatted with Yao Yao for a bit longer before hanging up. At his current pace, he would have to push back his plans with her to tomorrow. Black Sea Devil Banmu's health was just dropping too slowly.

Only moments after ending his call with Yao Yao, Nie Yan received another call. This time, it was Guo Huai.

「Are you busy right now?」Guo Huai asked.

「What do you need? Speak up.」

「I'll send you a video.」

「I don't have the time right now. What is it about?」Nie Yan asked. This video definitely contained something important. Guo Huai would have never disturbed him otherwise.

「It's a video of Bloodlust Blades capturing their first stronghold. You can watch their core members all riding horses!」Guo Huai replied. It appeared Bloodlust Blades was faster than them by a step. It couldn't be helped they fell behind, since they were held back in their growth by the combined efforts of Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame. However, they could still catch up!

「Did Bloodlust Blades receive an investment?」Nie Yan asked in surprise. According to his knowledge, the only way for a guild to suddenly have the surplus funds to purchase mounts was by receiving the investment of a financial group.

「I don't know, yet,」Guo Huai replied.

Nie Yan sank into deep thought. It was very likely Bloodlust Blades had received an investment, and the entity backing them from behind the scenes was almost certainly Century Financial Group. This put him on high-alert.

「How are the negotiations proceeding with the Dragonsoar Financial Group?」Whether they received an investment was crucial to the guild's growth. He had previously planned to ask his father for help. But after considering, if his father invested into Asskickers United, what would be the fate of the War God Tribe? This was a problem he had to solve himself. He couldn't always rely on his father to bail him out. Only then could he lead both guilds to glory!

There were no major downsides in Asskickers United receiving financial support from the outside. After redistributing the shares, Nie Yan would hold a 56% stake, Dragonsoar Financial Group would hold a 30% stake, and Guo Huai and the others would hold a 14% stake, meaning absolute control of the guild would still fall to Nie Yan. Although all the shares would no longer remain inhouse, their value would skyrocket following the investment. With a powerful financial backer, Nie Yan could rapidly raise the strength of his core guild members as well as alleviate any concerns they had for the future, allowing them to focus solely on serving the guild.

Obtaining Dragonsoar Financial Group's investment also meant obtaining their backing. As rivals, there was definitely no small number of conflicts between Dragonsoar Financial Group and Century Financial Group. If Nie Yan pitted these two financial powerhouses against each other, he would gain a powerful ally. After all, the enemy of my enemy is my friend!

No matter how strong Asskickers United was, it had no chance competing against an entity like Century Financial Group. This was why Nie Yan had to exploit every avenue available to him!

This was what you called seizing the opportunity!

「We've pretty much finished negotiations. These are the fruits of our final talks. Take a look. They've already said this is the best they can offer.」Guo Huai sent the final draft of the contract to Nie Yan.

Nie Yan looked over the terms. Dragonsoar Financial Group would provide support to Asskickers United in many ways, such as giving all contracted members a monthly salary of 5,000 credits paid out in Nie Yan's name. Dragonsoar Financial Group would start acquiring gold from the marketplace and invest 300,000 gold into Asskickers United. This gold would be divided into 50 payments over the course of two months. It would be used to improve the equipment quality of the guild members. Dragonsoar Financial Group would send over a supervisor to manage how the gold was utilized.

There were so many players in the entire Viridian Empire that several hundred gold would be traded over the Credit Exchange every single day! It wasn't too far-fetched to say the Dragonsoar Financial Group could accumulate 300,000 gold in just two months. After all, such a massive consortium would naturally have various supply chains such as employing gaming organizations, buying from professional players, and much more. Their resource-amassing capabilities were far beyond what Nie Yan could even dream of. They wouldn't just gather gold from Calore but also other cities, including even the headquarters of Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors! Gold from all over the Viridian Empire would gather into one place, the pockets of Asskickers United!

If they could secure such a massive investment for themselves, they wouldn't have to fear hitting a brick wall in their growth!

Cao Xu's Century Financial Group would also operate similarly.

Nie Yan could imagine how difficult it would be for Asskickers United to resist Century Financial Group if they didn't receive the investment of another powerful financial group.

After reviewing the conditions of the contract, they could be best described as extremely generous!

However, Asskickers United did indeed possess such negotiating power!

Nie Yan thought for a moment, then decided it'd be best to add a few more conditions. For example, he wished to include that Dragonsoar Financial Group was not allowed to interfere with Asskickers United's commands. This clause allowed the guild leader to make a major mistake leading to severe losses, but he would be forced to compensate the Dragonsoar Financial Group for any damages suffered. He sent the contract back to Guo Huai, avoiding any possible dangers that might arise from any loopholes.

Guo Huai sent the revised contract to the Dragonsoar Financial Group.

The contract stipulated an initial investment of 20,000 gold, which Nie Yan could use for various purposes. He could buy horses

and other items for Asskickers United's core elites, fund the money-burning undertaking known as leveling up in Everlasting City, or boost their players' strength as quickly as possible. After all, these elites were the true backbone of Asskickers United!

Dragonsoar Financial Group showed great sincerity allowing Nie Yan to feel reassured. Their requirement was for Asskickers United to capture a Basic Stronghold within the next five days and 5 Basic Strongholds within the first month. From Nie Yan's perspective, this was a trivial matter.

If Nie Yan used the 20,000 gold to create a valiant 500-man team composed of all Level 40 or higher players, clearing out a Basic Stronghold would be a piece of cake!

As for the video Guo Huai sent over, he would watch it some other time. Nie Yan hung up, then focused his attention back on dealing with Banmu. When 2 PM came around the corner, he received an update from Guo Huai. Dragonsoar Financial Group had agreed to the additional terms.

Nie Yan signed his name, the person over on the side of Dragonsoar Financial Group and Guo Huai also signed their names, and the contract was complete.

Tomorrow, the first payment of 20,000 gold would be deposited into their account!

Nie Yan was somewhat excited. By partnering up with Dragonsoar Financial Group, only now was Asskickers United



taking its very first step on the path to hegemony!

After waiting for a full seven hours, Nie Yan finally heard the despairing wails of a dying Black Sea Devil Banmu. It was finally dead! Looking down, he could barely see past the turbulent waves caused by the boss' death throes. As the waters slowly settled, the monster's red eyes dimmed and it sank to the bottom of the cove.

## Chapter 282 – Chapter of Peace

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When Black Sea Devil Banmu finally fell to Nie Yan, Lil' Gold lit up with a brilliant radiance and levelled up six times, all the way to Level 26. Since Nie Yan had changed his experience settings, Lil' Gold received full experience from Banmu.

Nie Yan jumped down from the cliff face and landed on one of the three rocky islands. He called Lil' Gold out of his hiding spot, then checked his upgraded stats: 1,030 health and 730–757 attack and magic power. As Lil' Gold's level rose, his frightening growth rate would start showing an increasingly greater effect. His stats would soon reach ludicrous heights!

Nie Yan could scarcely imagine just how powerful Lil' Gold would become down the line.

Lil' Gold also grew another head taller, making him about as tall as Nie Yan.

Nie Yan recalled Lil' Gold in a brief flurry of excitement. He still hadn't collected the loot that dropped from Banmu!

He jumped off the rocky island, falling roughly 30 meters before plunging into the water with a loud splash.

Nie Yan activated his Underwater Breathing Pearl and dove down. Swimming ever deeper, he followed the columns of light that bore down from above the water's surface until he arrived at the bottom of the cove, where they could scarcely reach. By now,

Banmu's corpse had despawned. He searched around the seafloor for a while before eventually finding the drops. A certain item among the pile drew his attention, a pearl that emitted a faint glow in the surrounding darkness.

Nie Yan's heart quivered. Could it really be...? No, I'll get back up to the surface first.

Stuffing all the items into his bag, Nie Yan was about to swim back ashore when a shimmer in the far distance caught his eye.

Nie Yan raised an eyebrow in surprise. He was familiar with this sort of light. This gentle yet piercing radiance without a doubt belonged to a chapter from the Book of Order!

He immediately started swimming towards the light. I've never heard of there being a chapter in this area...

Swimming through the murky waters, Nie Yan was suddenly caught by a strong current which nearly swept him away.

An intense feeling of foreboding surfaced in his heart. Aside from Banmu, was there another powerful monster lurking in these waters?

Nie Yan took out an Unknown Transfer Scroll. If he encountered any danger, he could use it to escape at a moment's notice.

After much struggling, he regained control of his body and

continued swimming forwards. About five minutes later, he could almost touch the source of the light. Only a few meters away, he saw its origin—a golden scroll floating calmly in the darkness, giving off a dazzling radiance.

Nie Yan's heart shook in excitement. It really was a chapter from the Book of Order!

He wondered if anyone had found this chapter in the previous timeline. He never knew there was one here. This encounter was purely coincidental!

If he hadn't noticed that faint shimmer in the distance, he would've never come searching in this area.

Nie Yan pondered on the information he collected in his past life. Every chapter from the Book of Order was discovered by players exploring maps for the first time. Only 31 were ever found. As for the remaining five, no one knew of their locations.

There weren't many chapters near Calore, only about 12 in total. The other 24 were scattered in maps around other cities. Some were even located in the distant Satreen Empire. Nie Yan knew the rough locations of many of them. However, acquiring them was but a wishful dream for now. They were either guarded by extremely terrifying existences or hidden in almost impossible to reach places. Him completing the Glimpse of Darkness at this stage of the game was already an extraordinary accomplishment.

Nie Yan was overjoyed at finding another chapter from the Book

of Order. The Glimpse of Darkness was already overpowered. If he could complete another volume, just how much power would he wield?

Nie Yan vigorously swam toward the chapter.

A strange, captivating melody drifted over from somewhere far out in the abyss.

Nie Yan's vision swam as illusions of scantily clad maidens, showing off their bare-naked skin, appeared before him. His eyelids grew heavy, his body relaxing as drowsiness took over him. It was as if he were atop cloud nine!

At the very last moment before he lost consciousness, Nie Yan's mind shook in alarm as he quickly regained his senses. His intuition told him he fell subject to the Song of the Siren!

Legends told of Sirens living far out at sea that sung bewitching melodies which invoked the deepest desires of men. Anyone who heard their songs would fall fast asleep, only awakening after what felt like an eternity.

Only those with an especially firm will could resist their song.

The Siren's melody was otherwise impossible to escape.

Nie Yan was done for if he waited for the Siren to come closer. It was a Level 100+ monster!

He struggled to maintain a semblance of clarity as he swam closer to the chapter. However, a surging current knocked him about a meter back.

Nie Yan spotted a faintly glowing figure swimming towards him in the far distance. Its upper half was a young naked woman while its lower half resembled the tail of a fish covered in dark scales! It wielded a large golden trident which flickered with a sharp light.

It had simply wandered here from further out at sea. Nie Yan felt incomparably nervous. Although the Siren was only the size of a human, it was still an unrivalled existence, especially at his current level!

Perhaps the Siren had swam all the way over here after hearing the commotion Nie Yan caused by fighting Banmu.

Nie Yan felt a sense of drowsiness wash over as the Siren's song drifted into his ears. Feeling his eyelids become heavier, he forced himself awake and swam faster toward the chapter.

The Siren brandished its trident and sent a crescent-shaped beam flying towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan quickly did an underwater tumble as the beam brushed past his body.

The Siren charged toward him, resembling an arrow piercing

through the water.

Seeing the Siren about to reach him, Nie Yan reached out and grabbed the chapter, then performed some underwater acrobatics to create space.

The Siren's trident swept toward him. Nie Yan could feel a cold chill behind his neck. If he was hit, he would be a dead man for sure!

The Siren arrived beside him and slashed down with its trident.

In this life-or-death moment, Nie Yan activated the Unknown Transfer Scroll just in time to see the trident coming down on him.

The surroundings blurred, and Nie Yan was teleported away.

The Siren looked around in confusion. It could no longer sense Nie Yan's presence.

Nie Yan reappeared on land as he hit the ground with a thud. With his head still spinning, he looked around and discovered he was in a dense forest. He could hear the roars of monsters in the distance. As he felt a heavy drowsiness overtake him, he found a concealed spot between two trees to hide in before losing consciousness.

High Willpower and Focus stats would grant greater resistance to abnormal status effects. But the Siren's song was simply too

powerful. After holding out for a good while, he still eventually succumbed to it.

About 30 seconds later, Nie Yan woke up.

There were many Level 50 monsters roaming around the area. Thankfully, none of them discovered him while he was sleeping. Otherwise, he would find himself waking up in the Calore cemetery.

Seeing several Demon Bears wandering over in his direction, Nie Yan shot out a web line from his Silk Spinner Ring and climbed up a tree. He felt they wouldn't pose a threat to him this high up.

Nie Yan impatiently took out the chapter and looked over its properties.

### -Chapter of Peace

Description: The second chapter of Volume V of the Book of Order. A fragment of a Legendary item. Whoever shall possess this chapter will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!

Properties: Chance to nullify an incoming enemy spell. Receive 5 additional health every level up. Endurance +30, Resilience +20, Physique +30, Movement Speed +20.



God's Blessing: Grants immunity to all magic and gain 30% extra health for 60 seconds.

Cooldown: 2 days (1/2)

Restrictions: Can only be bound by a member of the Righteous Guardian of Order.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's bag.

The Chapter of Peace was just like any other chapter from the Book of Order. It couldn't be traded and would drop upon death. It wouldn't be inferior to other chapters. He still had to do some investigating to find out how useful the first property was. But he could tell that the second property which granted 5 additional health every level up was perplexingly powerful. If he held onto it, at level 100, he would have several hundred more health than other Thieves! As for God's Blessing, its shorter cooldown made it much more practical than Adjudicator of God, which had a cooldown of 10 days.

Right after binding the Chapter of Peace, Nie Yan received two system notifications.

Cigarette Ash is in possession of the third chapter from Volume V of the Book of Order, Chapter of Compassion. You will be notified of the player's location once every hour.

Coordinates: Moonlight City, 38535.38532.35582.

Faded is in possession of the fifth chapter from Volume V of the Book of Order, Chapter of Knowledge. You will be notified of the player's location once every hour.

Coordinates: Radiant City, 58535.53582.582.

Moonlight City and Radiant City were respectively the headquarters of Alliance of Mages and Bloodlust Blades. I wonder if these two players belong to those guilds. A sense of vigilance immediately arose in Nie Yan's heart.

It would be troublesome if he got ambushed. After thinking for a bit, he decided to ask Guo Huai for more Unknown Transfer Scrolls since he had run out.

Nie Yan planned to have Guo Huai track these two players down. It would be best if he could obtain their chapters without much fuss. Otherwise, if it turned out they belonged to Bloodlust Blades or Alliances of Mages, things could get dangerous with his exact coordinates being reported hourly.

# Chapter 283 – Pearl of Disguise

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As more higher level maps started getting explored, more chapters from the Book of Order would be discovered. All chapter holders that had yet to complete their respective volumes would be pitted against each other until one final victor emerged!

Nie Yan, who had just obtained the Chapter of Peace, was about to start his hunt to complete yet another volume!

Every hour from now, he would be reminded of who his rivals were, and where they were.

But as the owner of the Glimpse of Darkness, Nie Yan definitely held the advantage. There was no harm in him participating in the fight for the other chapters.

Nie Yan checked his other spoils, specifically that pearl!

He rummaged through his bag and took out the pearl which was about the size of a dove egg. It glistened beautifully with a light blue radiance under the rays of the sun.

Pearl of Disguise (Dark Gold): Special Item

Disguise: Within 10 hours of killing a target (player or NPC), the user may assume their appearance for up to 30 minutes. Attacking will dispel the disguise. Can be seen through by

certain skills.

Cooldown: 1 day

It really was the Pearl of Disguise!

The Pearl of Disguise was an extremely rare drop from Black Sea Devil Banmu that took up an accessory slot. It was an irreplaceable treasure to those who could take advantage of its unique ability.

It had limited use to the members of the Righteous Faction. However, over in the Evil Faction, this item was highly coveted.

The Pearl of Disguise, along with the Silk Spinner Ring, Crawler Ring, and Leaper Ring, were treasures of immense value to Nie Yan.

However, the Disguise skill had its limitations. It was pivotal Nie Yan acted with caution when using it. His Eye of Truth skill, for example, could see right through the disguise!

Nie Yan looked at the remaining two pieces of loot. One of them was a golden scroll. It was covered in runes and patterns. With a glance, he could tell these runes originated in the Dark Era. They gave off a strange and gloomy air.

It wasn't a magic scroll but rather another type of item. Nie Yan slowly unfurled the scroll, causing a golden radiance to blossom

out. After the radiance dimmed down, he discovered a fully intact map.

Several characters on the top right corner of the map were written in the Vanbiya language of the undead: “Lich King Saul’s Secret Treasure!” The eccentric brush strokes of these characters radiated a gloomy, corrosive power.

It was a Legendary-grade Hidden Treasure Map, and it was even fully intact!

It was extremely rare to find an undamaged treasure map. Normally, they would be divided into many fragments. Very few could piece together a whole map. Looking over this map, Nie Yan raised an eyebrow in surprise. He examined the drawings on the map, its mountains, plains, and rivers, as well as icons denoting the underworld. All types of scenery appeared before his eyes.

Nie Yan carefully examined the map. After some time he identified a few familiar landmarks. The mountains, plains, and rivers probably belonged to the Level 60 map, Sonier Valley. There’s actually a passage in Sonier Valley leading to the underworld? How come I’ve never heard of this before?

Lich King Saul’s hidden treasure was located in the underworld. As for where exactly it was hidden, he would have to reference back to the map once he arrived in the underworld.

Nie Yan read over a summary about Lich King Saul. He was once a pirate who collected vast amounts of wealth and treasures. Later

on in his life, he became fascinated with necromancy and started learning its arts of raising the dead. Gifted with immense talent, he became a powerful lich. At the last stretch of his life, he buried the treasures he had amassed and drew up a treasure map, enchanting it with an undead curse; it was the key to opening his treasure. After entering eternal sleep, some of his subordinates stole the treasure map, eager for its riches. But they fell to its curse, and the map was lost in the sands of time ever since.

Liches were known as the most powerful beings among Necromancers. Naturally, the treasures they left behind would be exceptional!

Nie Yan suddenly felt somewhat weak and lightheaded. Looking at his status, he was affected by a curse that reduced all his stats by 30%.

The effect of this curse was truly enough to frighten a person. Thankfully, this map didn't bind to its owner. After putting it into his personal storage, it would have no effect on him at all. When he wanted to find Lich King Saul's treasure, he could simply take it out.

Nie Yan could confirm the hunt for this treasure would be fraught with danger! This was why he decided to put it off until he was higher level.

Putting away the treasure map in his bag, Nie Yan looked at the remaining piece of loot, a Dark Gold heavy shield. It was perfect for a Fighter, with a defense of 622. However, it had a level requirement of 50. No guild member could equip it, for now.

His harvest this time around was quite fruitful. In the future, he could come here every 3 days to farm Black Sea Devil Banmu. It was tantamount to him finding an exceptional levelling spot.

The system created all kinds of unique terrains as well as various environmental objects and special items in an effort to let players think for themselves. There were endless ways to best Elites and Lords, and many of them didn't require a large team. If a player used their head, studying the boss' attack patterns and the environment, they could easily think of ways to outsmart and kill the boss.

Using the Crawler Ring and Silk Spinner Ring was only one of those methods. After all, a player had used the Levitation Ring to achieve the same in the previous timeline. Of course, there were many more methods.

Conviction contained countless special items, giving players plenty of room to utilize their creativity and imagination.

It was only because Nie Yan had watched so many videos in the previous timeline that he could think of all sorts of unique ways to level. If he levelled up like ordinary players, spending all day long grinding mindlessly in one spot, he would be using his time too inefficiently.

After killing Black Sea Devil Banmu, Nie Yan used a Return Scroll to teleport back to Calore. He put away the treasure map in his personal storage. Looking at the clock, there wasn't much time left

to the day.

Nie Yan went to Everlasting City for some last minute levelling before logging off.

As usual, he left for school, where he occasionally chatted with Xie Yao, building their friendship. Although they never discussed love, he had already made some good headway. For him who had the experiences of two lifetimes, these types of days were the most blissful.

The school day flew by, and before he knew it he was back at home.

As soon as Nie Yan logged back into the game, he received an update from Guo Huai. The first payment from Dragonsoar Financial Group had been deposited. It was 20,000 gold in total.

“Did the person they sent to supervise come?” Nie Yan asked. As the leader of the guild, he would naturally have to meet them.

“Yeah, she’s already here. I’ll take you to meet her.” Guo Huai led Nie Yan into the guild headquarters.

Around 40 or 50 players were scattered about in the guild headquarters.

After entering Guo Huai’s office, Nie Yan saw a woman in her 30s seated in a chair. She wore purely decorative civilian clothing. Her



attire was simple, yet professional. Although she wasn't a heaven-toppling beauty, she still exuded a mature charm.

"Hello, my name is Yu Rui. I'm the supervisor the Dragonsoar Financial Group sent over," Yu Rui greeted with a faint smile. She extended her hand toward Nie Yan.

"Hello, I'm Asskickers United's guild leader. It's nice to meet you. I hope we can have a pleasant time working together," Nie Yan politely replied as he shook Yu Rui's hand. He previously believed Dragonsoar Financial Group would send over a middle-aged man in his 40s. Never had he expected their representative to be a woman.

Nie Yan briefed Yu Rui on the various guild affairs. She earnestly listened while recording down some details in her notes.

The three chatted a bit longer to get more familiar with one another. Like this, their cooperation down the line would go smoother.

Yu Rui was easy to get along with. She gave Nie Yan a few conditions. As long as the request wasn't too excessive, she would accept. She didn't have the slightest bit of arrogance that you would expect from someone belonging to such a large financial group. This allowed Nie Yan to relax. It was evident that Yu Rui's superiors had explained a thing or two to her; otherwise, she wouldn't treat the guild with such courtesy. With her mindset, it would be much easier to handle affairs.

Nie Yan distributed the recently received 20,000 gold between the guild members. 500 players were divided up into 25 teams, with each team receiving around 300 gold. In addition, all of them received a 20-gold horse. They were dispatched to level in Everlasting City. Their objective was to get to Level 40 as quickly as possible! Only then could they start capturing strongholds.

Nie Yan checked the level leaderboards. It had completely changed from the last time he saw it. Some people had risen up to the top, most notably the guild leader of Bloodthirst Blades. He was ranked third at Level 35. There were also a few unfamiliar names which he had never heard of. It appeared he would have to investigate them.

Tang Yao, who was Level 37, was still firmly seated at the top of the leaderboards. Ever since reviving his Arcane Fairy, he had been levelling much faster. After experiencing so much, he had also matured. He was starting to transform into a genuine expert. Even though Nie Yan wasn't by his side guiding him, he was still able to learn and stand by himself.

Nie Yan's unique way of thinking had begun influencing the people around him. Many of them were levelling up at an astonishing rate. Some people who had never reached their full potential in the previous timeline, after receiving Nie Yan's guidance, were enlightened and started rapidly improving.

Under his leadership, just how many miracles would emerge from Asskickers United?

After settling the matters in the guild, Nie Yan went to meet up

with Yao Yao at the Holy Shrine.

The Holy Shrine, also known as the Temple of Light, was the headquarters of the most powerful religion in the Viridian empire. Even the council members of the empire had no choice but to avoid their spears. The Holy Shrine had a very deep foundation, lasting for several eras. Every successive pope could even have an audience with god.

At the Holy Shrine, Nie Yan stood before a grand building constructed with the architecture of the Shared Era of Governance. It was about 60 meters tall and completely white. There were ancient stairs leading to the main square.

Yao Yao was currently standing on one of the stairs. Her pure white robes gave off a holy, otherworldly air. She was like a goddess from the ancient past. She looked extremely beautiful under the light of the sun. Nie Yan couldn't help but quiver as buried feelings resurfaced in his heart.

## Chapter 284 – Legendary Quest

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“You’ve come.” Yao Yao revealed a brilliant smile. Her bright eyes resembled glittering gemstones.

Nie Yan fell into a daze. For an instant, Yao Yao’s appearance overlapped with Xie Yao’s in his mind. But he quickly shook his head in self-ridicule. How could there be such a coincidence in the world? He met Xie Yao long before Yao Yao in his past life. It wasn’t until after graduation that he started playing Conviction, where he eventually met Yao Yao. Interestingly enough, his meeting with her was purely coincidental. They had become acquainted through the girlfriend of one of Zhai Hao’s friends. Yao Yao was invited to play with their group, and they started running dungeons and levelling together.

At that time, Nie Yan was downtrodden with life and lonely. As he gradually got closer to Yao Yao, the two of them formed a special relationship. Her genuine concern for his well-being touched him deeply. It was a short-lived happiness, however. They took it a step too far in a secret chamber beneath Fenarte City, after which Yao Yao started avoiding him and their friendship slowly returned to being platonic. He felt remorseful toward Yao Yao. Back then, he had indeed been at fault for taking their relationship down that path. But Yao Yao never rejected him. So in a moment of weakness, he gave in to his carnal desires and committed a grave sin of the virtual world.

Nie Yan walked up to meet her on the stairs. “Come on, let’s go in.”

“Mhm.” Yao Yao nodded before following behind Nie Yan. Her lips curved into a crafty smile as she stared at his back. He behaved more seriously inside the game, a stark contrast from how exasperating he was with his constant teasing in reality.

The two arrived at the entrance of the Holy Shrine, where they were greeted by two large gates crafted from towering, ancient trees. They were mottled with cracks and exuded an archaic air.

Nie Yan slowly pushed them open, revealing a massive hallway.

Rows upon rows of candles lined the walls, their flames swaying ever so gently from the slight draft. A crimson-red carpet lay spread out before them, with over 20 NPCs standing on either side in a line that stretched out to the far end of the hallway. Nie Yan recognized almost all of them by name. He settled his gaze on a certain individual among them.

This NPC wore ash-gray robes. His left sleeve was empty while the hand he held his staff with was missing a forefinger. This was the legendary Holy Mage, Karsi!

Karsi watched as the two walked over to him.

“It’s an honour to meet your Holiness,” Nie Yan greeted in a respectful manner.

“Sir Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar, greetings.” Karsi nodded.

Nie Yan's current status was far from comparable to the other side's, so he had to abide by noble etiquette.

Seeing Karsi address Nie Yan in such a manner, Yao Yao was slightly taken aback. But then she remembered just what kind of person Nie Yan was inside the game, someone who created a miracle wherever he went.

Nie Yan glanced at Yao Yao, then faced Karsi and respectfully asked, "I'm here to request permission to help this young lady with her quest. Your Holiness, are you willing?"

Karsi looked at Yao Yao. "She is as beautiful as the stars. I naturally see no problem in allowing you to help this little miss."

"Thank you, your Holiness."

A player was permitted to enlist the help of up to two others if they couldn't finish a quest by themselves. However, the levels of the helpers couldn't exceed their own by more than three.

Ever since dying to the Demonified Lord Sonia, Nie Yan still hadn't gotten his level back up. Yao Yao was currently Level 31 while he was only Level 29. So he definitely fulfilled the requirements to be her helper.

Karsi's gaze slightly trembled as he noticed the medal on Nie Yan's left shoulder.

“Pardon me, Grand Scholar. Is that not the Medal of the Ten Holy Paladins?” Karsi asked as he stared at Nie Yan with an intense gaze. His right hand was slightly trembling. He was clearly agitated.

“Yes, your Holiness. This is indeed the Medal of the Ten Holy Paladins. May I ask if you know the history behind it?” Nie Yan curiously asked. He had to be very deliberate with his wording when trying to fish out a quest from such an important NPC.

A peculiar light flashed across Karsi’s tranquil gaze. He revealed a wistful expression and let out a deep sigh. “This is an ancient matter.”

Nie Yan inwardly celebrated after seeing Karsi’s reaction. He had successfully triggered the quest dialogue!

“I am retracing the events of that era because of a task entrusted to me. Your Holiness, could you recount some of what transpired back then?” Nie Yan asked. He still had a quest regarding the Legend of the Ten Holy Paladins that remained unfinished. It was to seek out the truth behind what happened to them.

“I’ve lived for almost a thousand years, so long that I don’t even remember exactly how old I am anymore. Humanity is destined to never overcome their desires. Everything is as fleeting as a cloud of smoke, while time passes in the blink of an eye. I know I’m not a great record keeper. But I’m confident that I’ve looked back on the path I’ve trodden more than anyone else. I reminisce, constantly, every waking day. I try to stand still, but the vicissitudes of time continually pushes me forward. The things I’ve witnessed over the

years are as countless as the stars in the night sky. However, I still haven't forgotten the events that took place during the time we now call the Dark Era. I followed Sir Kavana across the vast land of Glennin in his campaign against the dragon race. Swearing blood oaths, reading out the Will of Light..."

From the pledge of the Ten Holy Paladins to the betrayal of Brewin, Karsi narrated these events in chronological order.

"After the death of Sir Kavana, Brewin betrayed the Will of God. He imprisoned the other eight members inside the Roth Swamp and the hidden caverns of the Laurent Mountains. They are guarded by the Hellhound, Cerberus. Brave Adventurer. If you save them, I, Karsi, am willing to become your servant and swear eternal loyalty to you!" Karsi declared emotionally.

Nie Yan was caught off-guard. He didn't expect Karsi to have been the servant of Kavana. Karsi was an extremely influential figure in the Holy Shrine. His words held as much weight as the Cardinals'. With the seat of Supreme Pontiff currently vacant, Karsi's support was crucial to the three Cardinals who wished to ascend to this position.

This was the backdrop of Conviction. Nie Yan naturally knew a bit about it.

It was rumoured only the person who collected all 36 chapters of the Book of Order was qualified to become the Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Shrine.



Karsi played such a crucial role back then, and even now. It was hard to imagine that this prominent figure could be obtained as a servant.

When a guild reached Level 8, the guild leader had a chance to obtain an NPC servant. This servant was often a hired NPC mercenary, but could also be any other kind of NPC.

As a legendary Holy Mage, a single cast of forbidden magic from Karsi could easily wipe out an entire stronghold!

However, Nie Yan also understood this quest wasn't something he could handle at his current level. Leaving Brewin aside, just the Hellhound, Cerberus, was more than enough to wipe him out instantly. As a Level 300 Lord, it was terrifying beyond imagination. Only a 1,000-man team of Level 170+ players stood a chance against it.

Not only this, but there were some inconsistencies in Karsi's description of the events. Brewin wasn't the only one who betrayed the Ten Holy Paladins. There were many accomplices who aided him in capturing the other members. This was probably a clue leading to a branching quest.

There would probably be more events down the road. This quest line was only beginning to unravel.

Yao Yao was baffled as she listened to the conversation between Nie Yan and Karsi. Something about betrayal, the Ten Holy Paladins, and even a little girl from the dragon race was involved,

all of it was too convoluted!

Nie Yan continued to chat with Karsi about matters related to the Legend of the Ten Holy Paladins. In the end, Karsi provided him with a single lead—seek out the Dragon Girl, Venita, in the Silent Gulf for more information!

“Did you understand any of that?” Nie Yan asked Yao Yao with a smile after finishing his conversation with Karsi.

“More or less, you received a Legendary quest?” Yao Yao asked. This was a bit frightening. Legendary quests didn’t simply fall from the sky, not to mention this one in particular involved the events of the Dark Era.

Nie Yan nodded. “I guess it could count as one. Too bad I need to be over Level 100 to carry it out. That’s why I’ll help you do Karsi’s Blessing first.”

Nie Yan turned back to Karsi. “Your Holiness, I’ll continue pursuing the truth. I won’t stop until I rescue the eight imprisoned members of the Ten Holy Paladins.”

Karsi showed a grateful expression. “You have my gratitude, Nirvana Flame. Just what I expected of a Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar!”

Nie Yan felt incredibly awkward every time Karsi called him a Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar. But it couldn’t be helped since

it was something set by the system. Titles represented status!

Nie Yan had obtained plenty of useful information from his conversation with Karsi. He was more motivated than ever to see this quest through to the end. Let alone the other rewards, just obtaining Karsi as a servant would make Asskickers United practically invincible!

As as a matter of fact, after the release of the Buried History expansion, Level 100 wasn't all that far away, probably 6 months at most. This was completely different from the previous timeline.

After bidding Karsi farewell, Nie Yan and Yao Yao walked out of the Holy Shrine.

“Let's head to Sinful Gorge,” Nie Yan suggested. He had a very simple method to obtain the Black Sin Lotus. “Have you learned Divine Protection yet?”

“Yes.”

“What rank?”

“Rank 3, why?” Yao Yao asked curiously. Was Divine Protection required for this quest?

“Good, that'll makes things a lot easier. Divine Protection is one of the most useful skills to have in Sinful Gorge since it's perfect for repelling the miasma in the air,” Nie Yan explained. Aside from

Divine Protection, a Featherfall Jewel was also required to employ his plan. But he already had one, so he didn't bring it up.

After stocking up on some necessary consumables in Calore, the two headed toward the transfer area. Their destination was the depths of Sinful Gorge!

Ordinary players would only wander around the entrances of the caves in Sinful Gorge. Its depths were full of legends. Nie Yan and Yao Yao's goal was one of the many mysterious items rumoured to be found in that place, the Black Sin Lotus!

## Chapter 285 – Sinkhole

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“Nirvana Flame, it’s been a long time since we last played together,” Yao Yao remarked. She deeply cherished her time with him, but she understood he was a busy person. Apart from levelling, he had to constantly attend to guild affairs as well. How could he have the free time to adventure with her like the old days?

“Ah, yeah... It has been a while,” Nie Yan murmured, a hint of guilt in his voice. His mind trembled as he noticed the forlorn expression in her eyes. Could it be that despite his best efforts, he had left a mark in her heart?

Yao Yao was beautiful, kindhearted, and thoughtful. Maybe in another world, where his heart didn’t already belong to someone else, he would’ve fallen in love with her instead. However, it was best not to linger on these matters.

When they arrived in the wilderness, Nie Yan turned to Yao Yao and asked, “Do you have a mount?” They would have to run to Sinful Gorge if she didn’t.

“Yep!” Yao Yao replied. She called forth a gallant steed with a crimson red coat. It wasn’t as valiant or imposing as his Faulkner Warhorse, but it was still quite the sight to behold.

Kohls Horse! Nie Yan didn’t expect to see such a high-quality mount.

It had a movement speed bonus of 200%!

If it wasn't obtained from a quest, it would cost at least several thousand gold!

Since this was her first time riding a mount, Yao Yao climbed on top of her Kohls Warhorse with an excited expression. When her grandfather decided to invest in Conviction, she became the representative of the Dragonsoar Financial Group inside the game. After slowly familiarizing herself with their network of contacts, collecting a few thousand gold was a trivial matter.

It was only after taking charge of Dragonsoar Financial Group's affairs that Xie Yao learned there were many other organizations inside the game aside from the guilds, such as gold farmers. They ranged in size from a few dozen members to several thousand. These players generally didn't join a guild. The game was work for them rather than entertainment. They would camp out in one area, endlessly grinding weak mobs for drops. They were even reluctant to part with consumables, gearing themselves up with the most basic equipment necessary for the job. At the end of the day, they would sell off any equipment and items they obtained, then head to the Credit Exchange to sell their gold or have a friend sell it for them.

This was all they did inside the game. The amount of money they earned from selling gold could at most be used to supplement some daily expenses. They were a bunch of low-class workers everybody looked down on. But it was precisely these players that generated a vast amount of gold every day. If you were to add it all up, it was enough to support several dozen guilds the size of Asskickers

United!

Xie Yao ordered all her subordinates to go through various channels to purchase from these gold farmers. She had a kind heart. With their lack of skill, these gold farmers couldn't be counted as professional players, and they generally lived difficult lives. She instructed her subordinates to buy their gold at a slightly higher rate. For a behemoth like the Dragonsoar Financial Group, this bit of money was like a drop in the ocean. However, this little act of kindness was greatly appreciated. In return, more and more gold farmers were willing to do business exclusively with the Dragonsoar Financial Group. Xie Yao quickly accumulated an inconceivable amount of gold, her funds even surpassing Nie Yan's. So acquiring a high-quality mount was naturally no issue for her. But even with money, the vast majority of players still couldn't purchase a royal mount like the Faulkner Warhorse.

Nie Yan was startled by Yao Yao's mount, but he quickly regained his composure. If someone like him could get a Faulkner Warhorse, why couldn't others obtain similarly high-quality mounts?

Nie Yan summoned his Faulkner Warhorse.

Xie Yao's Kohls Horse immediately appeared a lot smaller while standing beside Nie Yan's Faulkner Warhorse.

"Let's go," Nie Yan said.

The two steeds rose into the wilderness, kicking up a cloud of

dust. Nie Yan lowered his speed to match Xie Yao's.

From time to time, Nie Yan and Xie Yao would pass by a team or two in the middle of levelling and leave them dumbstruck. Even ordinary horses were a rare sight. So one could imagine their shock after spotting two high-quality mounts blazing through the wilderness.

Nie Yan and Xie Yao only felt the wind whistling past their ears as the scenery blurred around them. After galloping for about 6 minutes, they arrived inside the valley of Sinful Gorge.

The war from the other day was still fresh in Nie Yan's mind.

"You're back here again. Do you feel anything?" Yao Yao asked.

Nie Yan shook his head as a calm smile surfaced on his face. "No point lingering over the past. What's most important is seizing the present." This was mostly a reminder to himself that he should move on. In this life, he and Yao Yao were simply good friends.

"Where are we going?" Yao Yao asked. Nie Yan was guiding them away from the cave entrances she was familiar with.

"Just follow me. I know the terrain of this place better than anyone else," Nie Yan replied. He had a special method to reach the region where the Black Sin Lotus grew.

Although Yao Yao had her doubts, she followed him anyway.



Several minutes later, Nie Yan and Yao Yao arrived at the base of a mountain. Before them was a pitch-black, bottomless sinkhole. It emitted a foul miasma that gave a sinister feeling.

Nie Yan jumped down from his Faulkner Warhorse with Yao Yao following suit.

“Right here.” Nie Yan looked down at the sinkhole, then turned to Yao Yao and asked, “Do you have an item with the Featherfall ability?”

“I do! I have a Featherfall Ring,” Yao Yao replied. All her equipment was top-notch. How could she not have an item with the Featherfall ability! It was an essential item for any high-level player!

“Good, that makes things easier. Let’s unsummon our mounts first,” Nie Yan said, recalling his Faulkner Warhorse. Only now did he notice that Yao Yao was wearing some really high-end gear!

Yao Yao unsummoned her Kohls Horse. She looked down at the sinkhole and couldn’t help feeling a tinge of dread. There’s nothing scary down there, right?

Even though she didn’t know what was exactly in the sinkhole, dark places like these usually reminded her of vipers and other creepy crawlies.

“Let’s jump together. We’ll activate Featherfall after about 10 minutes!” Nie Yan instructed. He had been down this sinkhole before. It led directly to the depths of Sinful Gorge!

Yao Yao nodded after some slight hesitation. But she couldn’t fully shake off her anxiety.

“Don’t worry. Nothing bad will happen while I’m here,” Nie Yan comforted. He extended out his hand.

Yao Yao grabbed ahold and felt a sense of warmth wash over her as her heart gradually settled.

“3, 2, 1, jump!” The two of them jumped down, disappearing into the abyss. All they could hear was the wind rushing past their ears as they rapidly descended.

Nie Yan started counting down the time. He turned to face Yao Yao. Looking through the darkness, he could see the hazy outline of her silhouette.

Their falling speed quickly reached terminal velocity.

All they could see around them was a pitch-black abyss.

Nie Yan suddenly felt someone hugging him tightly. It appeared Yao Yao had instinctively grabbed onto the first thing she could reach when they jumped down, and that happened to be him. He felt an explosion go off in his head as a delicate fragrance wafted up

his nose. With his arm wrapped around her waist, he could feel the silken-smoothness of her skin through her robes, and he felt something akin to a pair of puffy clouds pressing against his chest. The sensations running through him were simultaneously familiar yet strange.

A seductive scene instantly flashed before Nie Yan's eyes. It was of Yao Yao's gorgeous body which was as delicate as a piece of china. On that passionate night, it was as though they had tried to meld their bodies together.

Nie Yan shook his head, calming his mind. It was simply a lingering memory of a world that no longer existed, like the captivating yet fleeting red clouds far out in the horizon during sunset.

While hugging onto Nie Yan, Yao Yao felt a sense of warmth and security even though her cheeks were burning hot with embarrassment. This was her first time being so intimate with a boy. She never planned for this to happen.

"Yao Yao, activate your Featherfall Ring," Nie Yan said. He activated his Featherfall Jewel as his falling speed slowed to a crawl.

Hearing Nie Yan's muffled voice in her ears, Yao Yao activated her Featherfall Ring in a fluster.

The two slowly floated down and gently landed on the ground.

Even though it had taken them roughly 15 minutes to reach the bottom of the sinkhole, it wasn't all that dark down here. Their surroundings were illuminated by strange ores that emitted a faint glow.

“Let's go down a little deeper. We'll reach the Black Sin Lotus in no time,” Nie Yan said. After a moment of silence, he clenched his teeth and turned away, heading towards a tunnel.

Staring at his back, Yao Yao felt her heart turn sour. Whenever she felt they had gotten closer, he would push her away. This sort of feeling hurt her deeply.

Yao Yao took a deep breath. She could at least take comfort in the fact she knew why he was acting so coldly toward her. If he could restrain himself in these circumstances, it signified his character was trustworthy. It appeared what Xia Ling told her about him rejecting Jiang Yingyu's advances was true.

Yao Yao silently followed.

The winding and twisting passageways were like a labyrinth. A bone-chilling gust would occasionally blow through them while the distant sound of monsters could be heard further in the depths. Nie Yan could detect the thick miasma in the air. If a Holy Mage, Priest, or Paladin were to cast magic in this place, its effects would be greatly reduced.

Nie Yan and Yao Yao reached the end of the tunnel and arrived at a large underground lake whose waters were as black as ink.

Sitting at the center was a black lotus in full bloom. This was the item Yao Yao required for her quest, the Black Sin Lotus!

## Chapter 286 – Black Sin Lotus

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The Black Sin Lotus was a precious alchemy ingredient and the vital ingredient to concoct the Legendary Black Sin Potion. Its value was astronomical!

The monsters lurking below the water's surface were at minimum Level 40 while the Black Sin Lotus sprouted roughly 60 meters away from the shore. It was much more difficult fighting in water than on land, so obtaining it wouldn't be easy.

“Should we swim?” Yao Yao asked. With the Black Sin Lotus sitting far off in the middle of the lake, she believed the only way to reach it was by treading into these calm waters.

Nie Yan shook his head. “Hold on a second.” He walked over to the lake's edge and looked down, whereupon he saw a shadow in the water swimming towards him. His heart shook, and he quickly recoiled back.

With a large number of powerful monsters lurking below the surface, obtaining the Black Sin Lotus would prove quite the challenge.

It would've taken them over 6 hours just to get to this place if they hadn't taken a shortcut by jumping down the sinkhole. On their journey, they would've been delayed time and time again by the monsters that lurked around every corner.

Nie Yan summoned his pet Golden Dragon. Right now, Lil' Gold

was already quite strong. Enough so, to help him hunt monsters.

As a brilliant beam of light descended, a large Golden Dragon appeared before them.

“This is the Golden Dragon pet?” Yao Yao asked in amazement. She gently rubbed Lil’ Gold’s scales with her slender hands.

Lil’ Gold’s scales had a rough texture with a metallic shine. These scales were even more resilient than metal armour!

“Mhmm. I’ll go lure some mobs,” Nie Yan said. He walked up to a wall with his Cavalry Crossbow, then took aim at a shadow swimming in the lake.

He accounted for the refraction and fired.「Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!」Five bolts flew out in quick succession and struck the shadow, causing a gush of blood to dye the water red.

The shadow charged toward Nie Yan and leapt out of the water with a giant splash.

Nie Yan could finally see the appearance of the monster. It was about the size of a large grizzly bear with a muscular upper body. It was covered in black scales, had two sharp horns growing out of its head, and wielded a 5-meter onyx-coloured pitchfork.

Even though it was only a Leader-class monster, Nie Yan didn't relax. This monster was a far greater adversary than one might think on first glance.

Nie Yan quickly opened some distance and fired out another round of bolts from his Cavalry Crossbow.

「Put! Put! Put!」Another five bolts struck their target in quick succession.

-121

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A string of damage values floated up above the Black Horned Devil's head as it lost a sizeable chunk of its health.

Lil' Gold opened his maw and spewed out a mouthful of Dragon Breath at the Black Horned Devil.「Boom!」It left a large scorch mark on the Black Horned Devil's chest.

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A frightening damage value floated up into the air! Even Nie Yan was taken aback. He never expected Lil' Gold's damage to have already caught up to his own.

On second thought, Nie Yan understood why Lil' Gold's damage was so high. It was because Dragon Breath was a skill that ignored armour! The formula the system used to calculate damage was extremely complicated. It included several factors such as the type of attack, armour type, level disparity, and so on.

For example, Nie Yan's crossbow dealt 160% bonus damage to cloth and leather-armoured targets. Against plate-armoured opponents, this bonus was reduced to 50%. Lil' Gold's Dragon Breath was classified as a Chaos-type attack. It dealt 200% true damage to all targets. This was why the Black Horned Devil took so much damage despite the large level discrepancy.

Dark Binding!

Shadows crept up from the ground, tightly locking down Nie Yan. The Black Horned Devil had bound him, leaving him unable to move an inch.

Just as Yao Yao was about to come to the rescue by casting Dispel, Nie Yan shouted, "Cast Radiant Barrier on Lil' Gold!"

Yao Yao waved her staff, casting Radiant Barrier on Lil' Gold as a pure and holy membrane of light enveloped him.

Yao Yao's reaction speed was comparable to a top-ranking expert's.

Not a moment later, the Black Horned Devil charged straight for Lil' Gold and stabbed at him with its giant pitchfork.

「Klang!」Lil' Gold was pushed back several steps as the pitchfork struck the scales on his belly, causing sparks to fly everywhere. Thanks to the protection of the Radiant Barrier, Lil' Gold's defenses were bolstered considerably and he only took around 170 damage.

If it wasn't for Yao Yao's Radiant Barrier, Lil' Gold would have suffered far greater damage.

Lil' Gold was unfazed. He charged forward and swiped at the Black Horned Devil. Although this was only an ordinary attack, its damage was nothing to scoff at.

Yao Yao unleashed a barrage of spells at the Black Horned Devil, causing a string of damage values to float up above its head.

After Shadow Bind wore off, Nie Yan blurred into motion and reappeared behind the Black Horned Devil, striking out with Backstab followed by Eviscerate.

The Black Horned Devil roared out in anger and rammed itself against Lil' Gold.

Soon the battle reached its climax. Yao Yao rapidly condensed a ball of light in her left palm. When it could no longer get any smaller, she waved her staff and sent it flying at the Black Horned Devil.「Bang!」It stumbled back several meters.

-607 An astonishing damage value rose up above its head.

With a miserable screech, the Black Horned Devil collapsed to the ground with a heavy thud.

Yao Yao's last attack even shocked Nie Yan.

“Was that Holy Blast?” Nie Yan asked, dazed. Holy Blast had some distinctive traits, so he could barely recognize it.

Yao Yao nodded affirmatively. This was a skill she bought from a professional player for a hefty fee.

Holy Blast was one of the most powerful skills available to a Holy Mage at lower levels. It was something that would still be useful up until Level 50! But it was very hard to find a Holy Mage with this skill due to the low drop rate for its skill book.

Nie Yan never thought Yao Yao would even have Holy Blast. This aroused his suspicions. Without a deep background, ordinary players would be hard-pressed to collect such good equipment and skills. He had a thorough understanding of Yao Yao's abilities. Although she was an excellent player in her own right, she wasn't skilled enough to obtain gear and skills of this quality by her

lonesome self. He began wondering what sort of background she possessed.

However, Nie Yan quickly threw it to the back of his mind. It was best he focused on the matter at hand, the Karsi's Blessing quest, before letting his mind be clouded with curiosity.

Nie Yan walked up to the Black Horned Devil's corpse to pick up its drops. There was a blueprint for a piece of Level 40 Gold equipment and a Gold headband. To his surprise, it had the rare level requirement reduction property, allowing it to be worn at Level 30!

### Dark Ceremonial Headband (Gold)

Requirements: Level 40

Properties: Defense 32–38, Health +30, reduces level requirement by 10 if the user's Intelligence is over 260.

Restrictions: Female Holy Mage, can only be equipped by a member of the Righteous Faction.

Head ornaments were pieces of equipment that could only be worn by female players. This was the system giving them some preferential treatment. Thanks to this extra equipment slot, they usually had slightly higher defenses than their male counterparts.

However, because they were auxiliary equipment, their attribute bonuses were low by default. This Dark Ceremonial Headband's bonuses were already fairly high.

“It’s better than the one I’m wearing,” Yao Yao observed. It was quite rare to encounter a head ornament with such high properties.

“Take it,” Nie Yan said as he sent a trade request.

Yao Yao equipped the Dark Ceremonial Headband. She spun around in a circle, then asked, “Nirvana Flame, how do I look?”

She wore her new head ornament as a decoration, sticking it into her hair to give the black hairband some stripes. It added an extra layer of mysteriousness to her charm, giving her a rather distant aura.

Nie Yan slightly nodded. “Not bad.” Yao Yao was so pretty that no matter what she wore, she would never look bad.

Hearing Nie Yan’s compliment, Yao Yao’s face brightened with a smile.

“I’ll go lure the next mob.” Nie Yan hurriedly excused himself. He had to admit that Yao Yao was an outstanding beauty.

Nie Yan walked to the lake’s edge. He raised his crossbow and took aim. One Black Horned Devil after another was lured out of the water, and were subsequently killed by the three of them.

After buffing Lil' Gold with Radiant Barrier, he could even tank Level 40 Leader-class monsters like the Black Horned Devils. This allowed Nie Yan to have an even greater sense of appreciation for Lil' Gold's power. Although Lil' Gold required four times as much experience to level up as him at the same level, this was to be expected for such a powerful pet.

With Lil' Gold's terrifying growth rate, Nie Yan could hardly imagine how terrifying he would be at Level 100.

Noticing that Nie Yan was avoiding looking at her, Yao Yao revealed a sly smile. She felt the current him was quite amusing.

After half an hour or so, the trio cleared the entire lake of Black Horned Devils and confirmed there were no other monsters in the vicinity.

"Let's swim there together," Nie Yan suggested. Although it looked like they could just harvest the lotus after swimming there, he couldn't shake off this uncomfortable feeling in his mind. He had Yao Yao go with him as a precaution, so they could deal with any surprises together. For example, if another Black Horned Devil popped up, they could fight it together. After all, Nie Yan couldn't kill them by himself.

"Okay." Yao Yao nodded.

After Nie Yan unsummoned Lil' Gold, the two of them jumped into the ice-cold lake.

A cold gust of wind blew over the lake, causing ripples to form over the previously tranquil surface. It was as though a terrifying beast could pop out and swallow them whole at any given moment. However, as they looked down, all they could see was a pitch-black darkness. There was no way to get a clear view of what possibly lurked at the bottom. That was exactly why it instilled so much dread.

As the two of them swam through the lake, the Black Sin Lotus' pleasant aroma wafted over, causing them to subconsciously relax.

## Chapter 287 – Zennarde's Domain

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The Black Sin Lotus was an important item to Yao Yao. It was related to whether she could obtain Templar Magic.

Asskickers United was sorely lacking in Advanced Magic. Even though Nie Yan had tasked his guild members to acquire them, those who were successful could be counted on his fingers. This undertaking required time. The guild's foundation had to be slowly built from the ground up.

Every Advanced Magic was incredibly precious and vital to the growth of any guild!

Nie Yan helping Yao Yao with Karsi's Blessing was also helping out himself.

Asskickers United required Advanced Magic!

Nie Yan and Yao Yao approached the Black Sin Lotus. It was in full bloom and floated calmly atop the water's surface. Every petal was akin to a piece of finely carved obsidian, covered in streaks of pink that spread out like wisps of blood.

Nie Yan swam forward to harvest the Black Sin Lotus. He would worry about any possible danger after it was in his possession!

Yao Yao was treading the water roughly 2 meters away from Nie Yan. She was afraid of straying too far from him. As a Mage with



fragile defense, she would be in grave danger if she was ambushed by a monster.

The calming fragrance of the Black Sin Lotus gently wafted through the air.

As Nie Yan was about to reach for the Black Sin Lotus, an ice-cold current surged forth from the bottom of the lake, creating a whirling vortex that almost swept him away.

“Shit!” Nie Yan cried out in alarm as a sense of dread washed over him.

He felt a presence that previously lurked in the depths of the lake rushing up toward him. Perhaps this was the guardian of the Black Sin Lotus!

No time for regrets! Nie Yan reached out and plucked the Black Sin Lotus from its stem.

“Let’s get out of here, now!” Nie Yan shouted to Yao Yao after putting the Black Sin Lotus in his bag. They could escape with Return Scrolls after getting back on dry land!

In that instant, the entire lake started churning violently as a giant wave swept toward them.

“Hold on to me!” Nie Yan yelled. He wrapped his arms around Yao Yao’s waist and swam toward the shore with all his might.

But his efforts were in vain as the wave crashed into them, sending them tumbling through the water as they desperately tried to keep their heads above the surface.

“Nirvana Flame, go on without me! You’re faster, you can swim to safety!” Yao Yao shouted. Mages were dreadfully slow swimmers. In the time it took her to swim 5 meters, Nie Yan could swim almost 10 times that distance.

Nie Yan remained silent. Abandoning a woman to save his own hide? He might as well throw away all his face as a man!

Nie Yan and Yao Yao could only tightly hold on to each other as the wave threatened to pull them under. They were completely at the mercy of the turbulent currents, having long since lost the ability to control where they were going.

Nie Yan and Yao Yao were completely caught up in the current. All they could do was try their best not to get separated. Nie Yan frantically held on to whatever part of Yao Yao was in his grasp, terrified of letting her loose. More than once, he thought he failed and lost her. In such a disorienting situation, he had no idea what was what.

Yao Yao was struggling to breathe, and was starting to panic as she grew light-headed. But when she felt Nie Yan’s arm around her, a wave of calmness washed over her.

A strong current battered Nie Yan, dragging him and Yao Yao

ever closer to the bottom of the lake.

Yao Yao couldn't hold her breath for much longer. If Nie Yan didn't get them back to the surface, she would drown!

Nie Yan started becoming anxious. The terrifying pressure at the bottom of the lake left him unable to speak. He could sense something swimming towards them. It was eyeing them closely like prey.

Nie Yan struggled to open his eyes and saw a shimmer on the lakebed. Gritting his teeth, he swam toward it with Yao Yao in his embrace.

Nie Yan didn't know where the light came from, only that it grew brighter. In the end, his entire vision turned white as a feeling of passing through time and space came over him.

A spell of dizziness washed over Nie Yan. Even so, he firmly held Yao Yao in his embrace until his consciousness slipped away.

Nie Yan eventually awoke in a cold, barren desert, not knowing how much time had passed. A gust of wind blew by him, sending sand flying into the air.

Where are we?

Nie Yan tilted his head up at the sky, but only saw an endless sandstorm.

You have discovered Zennarde's Domain.

Zennarde? Wait, Zennarde the legendary Dragon King!?

Nie Yan recalled what he knew. Zennarde had relied solely on himself to establish the Hiberyth Empire. He had ruled over humanity and the other races for over 2,900 years, a period of time better known as the Dark Era. Could the rumours be true? Does this desert hide Dragon King Zennarde's Sword?

If the famous NPCs throughout history counted as legends, Zennarde was absolutely a mythical, deity-like existence! Other NPCs trying to compare with him was akin to a firefly trying to compete with the splendor of a full moon. Just his name alone would make people shudder in fear during his tyrannical reign. He was fully deserving of his reputation as the Dragon King.

Even though this place might hold Zennarde's Sword, Nie Yan didn't believe he had the qualifications to obtain it. As a godly existence, Zennarde naturally wielded a weapon deserving of his reputation!

After accidentally arriving in Zennarde's Domain, Nie Yan felt slightly apprehensive. He didn't know just what sort of dangers awaited them.

Nie Yan struggled for a while, but he couldn't budge an inch. Yao

Yao was lying right on top of him.

“Yao Yao, wake up.” Nie Yan nudged her gently.

Yao Yao was slowly roused awake.

“Nirvana Flame, where are we?” Yao Yao rubbed her eyes drowsily. “Is this the graveyard?” She distinctly remembered them being swept up by a rogue wave which dragged them to the bottom of the lake. “How did we get here?”

“We’re in a quest map!” Nie Yan answered. Located deep down at the bottom of the lake, the entrance to this realm was truly well-hidden. For information about Zennarde’s Sword to have leaked out, he wondered which player stumbled upon this place in the previous timeline.

Nie Yan had never heard of anyone obtaining Zennarde’s Sword, so its properties remained a mystery.

However, there were rumours that only a Paladin with a Holy Spirit Heart could wield Zennarde’s Sword.

Nie Yan searched for information related to Zennarde on the official website. But the only information that came up was about his reign as the Dragon King, his various achievements, and so on. Nothing about Zennarde’s Sword was found.

Nie Yan grew all the more curious.

This was an unknown area. Its secrets and treasures were just waiting to be unearthed.

Yao Yao crawled to her feet. Recalling how Nie Yan's hand had groped all over her body, her cheeks blushed with embarrassment.

Seeing Yao Yao's pitiful appearance, Nie Yan didn't know how to explain himself. An awkward atmosphere developed between them.

"Teleportation scrolls don't work here. Let's see what's up ahead. In any case, we've got the Black Sin Lotus. If worse comes to worst and we can't find the exit, we'll just die and return to Calore that way." Nie Yan broke the awkward silence. In order to prevent Yao Yao from feeling guilty, he didn't mention anything about his chapter from the Book of Order. If he dropped the Chapter of Peace, so be it.

"Mhm." Yao Yao nodded in agreement.

The two avoided making eye contact, only making small talk every now and then. When Nie Yan recalled Xie Yao, his heart slowly settled.

Nie Yan summoned Lil' Gold. Two people and one dragon set out toward the north, not knowing when they would find the exit. Before long, they encountered monsters roaming in the distance.

“I’ll go take a look,” Nie Yan said. After activating stealth, he slowly approached them under the shroud of the blowing sand.

Nie Yan inspected one of them with Transcendent Insight.

Undead Bone Hunter: Level 40

Health: 3,000/3,000

Good, they’re just ordinary Level 40 monsters. Nie Yan breathed out a sigh of relief.

These Undead Bone Hunters somewhat resembled cheetahs with sharp spikes protruding from their backs. They were quite fast. Nie Yan observed them occasionally sprinting around before slowing down to a passive state.

Nie Yan climbed up a steep mound and breathed in the cold air. He saw Undead Bone Hunters stretching out as far as the eye could see. If he and Yao Yao wanted to get past them all, how long would it take?

This place was just like the Illusory Realm of the Dullahans. Would they only be allowed to exit after completing the quest in this map?

“Let’s start clearing the mobs,” Nie Yan suggested. It wasn’t a bad idea to grind here for a while, at least until he got his level

back to where it used to be.

If Nie Yan lost the Chapter of Peace here, it truly would be a pity. Although it was only a single chapter, if he collected the other five in the future, he would obtain another item on the level of the Glimpse of Darkness!

The Book of Order was composed of six volumes. Each one gave different stat bonuses and benefits, and would trigger the release of an expansion. Anyone who collected all six volumes would become the Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Shrine! Of course, this wasn't a realistic goal. But if Nie Yan could obtain a few more volumes, he could roam the world as he pleased.

Nie Yan raised his Cavalry Crossbow and fired at one of the Undead Bone Hunters in the distance.「Put! Put! Put!」Five bolts struck the target in quick succession, causing a string of damage values to float up into the air. Almost 60 Undead Bone Hunters immediately charged toward him.

Holy Ardent Blaze!

Yao Yao waved her staff, causing beams of light to descend from the sky and bombard the Undead Bone Hunters. A blanket of damage values rose up into the sky. She dealt at least 500-600 damage to each of them.

This was an area-of-effect spell!



Holy Mages were better known for their single target damage. There weren't many area-of-effect spells available to them, not to mention they were quite rare. However, the few they had possessed formidable might.

At this moment, Lil' Gold spewed out a cone of Dragon Breath, dealing another 900 or so damage to the group of Undead Bone Hunters. Lil' Gold's Dragon Breath was even more terrifying against ordinary mobs.

Lil' Gold acted as the tank while Yao Yao cast spell after spell from the back. Nie Yan also joined the fray. Swaths of Undead Bone Hunter collapsed one after another, littering the ground with piles of bone fragments.

Nie Yan checked the quest he received back in the Illusory Realm of the Dullahans.

Task 6 – Kill 50,000 Level 30 or higher undead. (progress: 62/50,000)

His mind trembled in excitement. It would be great if he could complete task 6 and upgrade his Demon Hunter title while he was here.

Aside from this, the Glimpse of Darkness also required him to kill a certain amount of undead to unlock some skills.

Taking this into consideration, Nie Yan started feeling being trapped here wasn't all that bad. All they had to do was search around for some clues. Who knew what they might uncover?

## Chapter 288 – Zennarde's Cenotaph

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It was difficult to determine the true value of a title. Even the lowest ranking ones provided the player some benefit in the form of preferential treatment from NPCs, to say nothing of high-ranking titles such as Demon Hunter and Grand Scholar. Demon Hunter greatly raised Nie Yan's Influence, albeit only in human cities, while Grand Scholar granted him an even wider host of privileges.

Nie Yan wondered what sort of benefits he would receive by upgrading his Demon Hunter title from Intermediate to Advanced.

Thinking to this point, Nie Yan diverted all his experience to Lil' Gold whose mobbing speed far exceeded his own. It would only become faster with every level Lil' Gold gained.

Nie Yan's intuition told him that he and Yao Yao would most likely be stuck in Zennarde's Domain for at least the next several days.

These Undead Bone Hunters were seemingly endless. Nie Yan didn't know how long it would take to get through them. They dropped about 1 silver upon death but pretty much nothing else. Even so, the profit from grinding them wasn't too bad since it was impossible to encounter such drop rates in ordinary maps.

Nie Yan continued drawing aggro, while Yao Yao rested on the sidelines, drinking Spring Water to restore her mana. He fired out an endless stream of bolts and built up a large group of Undead

Bone Hunters behind him.

After Nie Yan rounded them up, Yao Yao and Lil' Gold would unleash their magic. Lil' Gold with his Dragon Breath and Yao Yao with her Holy Ardent Blaze. Swaths of Undead Bone Hunters collapsed to the ground.

Nie Yan's progress bar steadily rose. He discovered a kill only counted if he got the last hit. So he asked Yao Yao if she could leave the kills to him and Lil' Gold. Like this, his quest would progress at a much faster rate.

Lil' Gold charged into the fray and swept through the Undead Bone Hunters.

Before long, Lil' Gold rose to Level 28 and learned two new skills:

Meteor Drop (Junior): Summon a giant meteor, dealing 200% damage to all targets in a 20 meter radius and persisting burn damage for 20 seconds. Cast Time: 10 seconds. Cooldown: 30 minutes. Ranks up at Level 60.

Explosive Counter (Junior): When attacked, has a chance to retaliate against the enemy, dealing 200% damage. Ranks up at Level 50.

These two skills were quite formidable.

Even though it became harder and harder to raise Lil Gold's level, he became increasingly stronger with every level.

Seeing Lil' Gold learn two new skills, Nie Yan raised an eyebrow in surprise. Somehow, Lil' Gold's growth kept exceeding his expectations.

Nie Yan made a decision. Even at the cost of himself, he would definitely make Lil' Gold skyrocket in level.

Nie Yan used his Cavalry Crossbow to aggro about 60 Undead Bone Hunters, the screeching mob surging forward like a tide. A scorching hot meteor descended from the sky and smashed into them with a loud bang, causing flames to fly everywhere. Under the raging flames, the Undead Bone Hunters collapsed in droves.

Nie Yan checked his progress.

Task 6 – Kill 50,000 Level 30 or higher undead. (Progress: 1,223/50,000)

The number of kills rapidly accumulated.

“How much Spring Water do you have left?” Nie Yan asked. A Mage's sustainability was far too lacking. At regular intervals, they would be forced to take large numbers of Mana Potions, Spring

Waters, and so on to replenish their mana.

“I prepared plenty before we set out. I still have over 60 stacks left,” Yao Yao replied after checking her bag.

Because Yao Yao bought the Premium Spring Water, she could restore her mana to full with a single pouch, whereas others would be forced to chug down five or six ordinary Spring Waters. She wouldn't be running out of them anytime soon!

Since each stack contained 20 pouches, that meant she had over 1,200 pouches of Premium Spring Water which could last her at least six days.

Nie Yan was speechless. Each pouch of Premium Spring Water cost 1 silver. This meant she had spent over 1,200 silver or 12 gold! Even he would think twice about spending so much gold on something like this. In all of Conviction, Yao Yao might be the sole person who could behave so lavishly.

Since it appeared Yao Yao had prepared well in advance, there would be no problem with them levelling here for a few days.

Nie Yan and Yao Yao spent the next few days in relative peace. Nie Yan would occasionally deal with outside affairs such as Asskickers United's growth, movements from Bloodthirst Blades and Alliance of Mages, and so on.

It was a period of rapid growth for large guilds. Asskickers United

also quickly expanded, ranking up to a Level 5 guild with almost 60,000 members. The five auxiliary guilds also grew to around 10,000 members each, for a grand total of about 110,000!

Thanks to the investment of Dragonsoar Financial Group, more and more guild members reached level 40. Many of them were provided with mounts, causing about 10% of the guild to get around on horseback. This signified the start of a new era. Players were no longer restricted to their starting cities. They could start travelling throughout the Viridian Empire.

Nie Yan was clearer than anyone else about what this signified!

Guo Huai received reports that players from Bloodthirst Blades had started appearing in maps that bordered Calore's territory. Because Calore and Radiant City were relatively close, the two guilds had already made some contact. However, both sides acted with restraint for the time being, so no conflicts had broken out yet. Nevertheless, the smell of gunpowder was in the air.

Due to the future competition for strongholds, the two guilds would inevitably become enemies.

But apart from these matters, Nie Yan spent the remainder of his time with Yao Yao, levelling up on the Undead Bone Hunters.

Yao Yao especially enjoyed these dull days.

On the second day of grinding in Zennarde's Domain, Nie Yan

completed Task 6 and received the Advanced Demon Hunter title, increasing his Influence in all human cities by 30.

Nie Yan's goal was to reach 100 Influence. When a player reached 100 Influence in a city, they would receive special rewards, among which included the Glory Set.

Among all equipment, the Glory Set was only second to Sub Legendary sets. In the eyes of players, it counted among godly gear. In the previous timeline, not many people possessed it. Even giving an optimistic estimate, they would number no more than several thousand in the entire Viridian Empire.

The vast majority of players would be over Level 100 by the time they obtained this set.

Nie Yan also received another quest.

Task 7 – Kill 200,000 Level 30 or higher undead. (Progress: 0/200,000)

Nie Yan was curious as to what came after Advanced Demon Hunter. During this time, he and Yao Yao grinded in Zennarde's Domain nonstop.

On day five, Nie Yan was more than three quarters of the way to complete Task 7.



Task 7 – Kill 200,000 Level 30 or higher undead. (Progress: 162,832/200,000)

After killing countless undead, Nie Yan also unlocked a skill from the Glimpse of Darkness:

Gale Ambush: Dash toward a target at 300% movement speed, ambushing them and dealing 160% damage while ignoring armour and level difference. Cooldown: 5 days.

The number of powerful skills at his disposal kept increasing, but Nie Yan's level was lagging further behind every moment. Although he got back up to Level 30, it still fell well short of Yao Yao, who had already climbed to Level 42. On the leaderboards, players who were Level 45-46 could be found everywhere. However, the top of the level leaderboards didn't mean anything to Nie Yan. He could catch back up at any time. What made him most excited was that after sacrificing his own level growth, Lil' Gold had risen to Level 35! With over 3000 health and over 1000 attack and magic power, Lil' Gold was an extremely formidable opponent. When there was such a strong pet by his side, why would he have to worry about his level not keeping up?

It was a pity he had no stat points to add after levelling back up to 30. In Conviction, if a player dropped levels, they wouldn't lose their stat points. So after gaining those levels back, naturally they

wouldn't receive any.

On another note, because he was stuck in Zennarde's Domain, Nie Yan couldn't personally participate in the stronghold battle between Holy Empire and Radiant Sacred Flame. However, he sent over 100 of his strongest players to represent Asskickers United in the battle. With Resplendent Bladelight and the others there to help out, there wouldn't be any problems in securing the stronghold. After all, Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors didn't send people to fight. They were all busy trying to secure strongholds for themselves! Where would they find the time to help a futureless Radiant Sacred Flame?

During the fight, a minor incident occurred when Shadow Killer assassinated Sleepy Fox out of nowhere, almost causing Holy Empire to collapse. Fortunately, Asskickers United's powerful forces stood strong and carried the day, turning the tide back against Radiant Sacred Flame. Shadow Killer disappeared after his single kill, leaving only a single sentence for Asskickers United: "Tell Nirvana Flame to wash his neck, lest I dirty my blade!"

Shadow Killer's provocative words set all of Asskickers United into a murderous frenzy.

Nie Yan, who was still stuck in Zennarde's Domain, cracked out a faint smile after hearing these words. If Shadow Killer really dared to come, he wouldn't mind toying around with him for a bit.

In the previous timeline, Nie Yan had no hope of competing with a player on the level of Shadow Killer. But after reincarnating, Nie Yan had undergone a complete transformation, breaking free from

his cocoon and becoming a butterfly, an obscure nameless figure to the illustrious leader of Asskickers United. The present him had already long since surpassed his past self! Fearless and unrivalled, this was Nie Yan's motto in this life.

While paying attention to what was happening in the outside world, Nie Yan and Yao Yao continued pushing forward. The Undead Bone Hunters here didn't respawn. They finally found some clues when Nie Yan discovered a guidestone. It was covered in cracks and was already heavily eroded by the elements. Nevertheless, he could still clearly make out an arrow pointing toward a certain direction, below which were several characters written in the dragon language: Zennarde's Cenotaph.

## Chapter 289 – God’s Blessing

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Zennarde’s Cenotaph was where some of his belongings were buried, including the sword he wielded during the Dark Era. The tyrannical weapon tasted the blood of countless lives, leaving an everlasting mark on history.

It was simply impossible for a person without a Holy Spirit Heart to subdue this godly weapon which brimmed with an aura of slaughter.

Nie Yan didn’t know much about Holy Spirit Hearts except for they were difficult to obtain. Only three players were rumoured to have ever received them in the previous timeline. However, he didn’t know what methods they used. Holy Spirit Hearts weren’t class-exclusive, but Paladins did have a somewhat easier time acquiring them. This was because it was reported a Holy Spirit Heart could be gained after purifying a certain number of undead, and at the later stages of the game, Paladins possessed an aura skill which had a chance of purifying any weak undead that entered their sphere of influence.

No matter how difficult, Nie Yan wanted to at least get a look at Zennarde’s Sword. He knew wanting to obtain it was a fool’s errand. But just seeing it was still within the realms of possibility, right?

Nie Yan and Yao Yao moved in the direction the guidestone pointed.

Still barring their path was the endless sea of Undead Bone Hunters. However, Nie Yan discovered they were a lot easier to deal with than before. He quickly realized why after checking his status:

Advanced Demon Hunter – Increases Influence in all human nations by 30. Reduces the stats of every creature of darkness within 20 meters of the player by 30%.

Intimidate (Enhanced): Inflict the target with fear and cripple their movements for 3 seconds. Range: 5 meters.

Deterrence (Enhanced): Disperse all monsters within the surrounding area for 15 minutes. Not valid if the monsters' level exceeds the player's level by over 30.

Advanced Demon Hunter didn't give anything new, but all of the existing properties received a substantial boost. Nie Yan would probably have to raise the title's rank again or maybe upgrade it to an even higher tier to receive a new skill.

The greater the debuff to the surrounding undead, the faster Nie Yan and Yao Yao shredded through them.

In the distance, a massive grave gradually revealed itself to them. It was made of ashen gray rocks and piled several tens of meters high. The highest stone, which showed clear signs of weathering, sported a dark entrance that led deep underground.

With his sights set on Zennarde's Sword, Nie Yan planned to

explore the depths of this Cenotaph. Regardless of what happened to him down there, his journey here could be counted a success.

“I’m running out of Spring Water,” Yao Yao said with furrowed brows after checking her bag. Even over 60 stacks couldn’t hold up to so many days of non-stop grinding.

Nie Yan thought for a bit, then suggested, “How about you return to Calore with the Black Sin Lotus without me? I’ll explain to you how to proceed with the next step of Karsi’s Blessing. Go find Blacksmith Kade and ask him to craft you a Silver-grade Rosary. Wear it during the next stage of the quest.”

Yao Yao thought for a moment. Without any mana recovery items, she would only be a burden to Nie Yan if she stuck around.

Her only choice was to die to return back to the city.

“Alright, I’ll go finish Karsi’s Blessing by myself.” Yao Yao nodded. Nie Yan appeared quite interested in this quest, to the extent that he wouldn’t be satisfied until he saw it through to the very end.

Nie Yan traded the Black Sin Lotus to Yao Yao. He only needed to give her a bit of guidance for the next stage, and she would be fine. With the Silver-grade Rosary, the difficulty would become a lot more bearable.

“Alright, Nirvana Flame, I’ll take my leave.” Yao Yao’s eyes

flashed with deep reluctance as she began taking her equipment off.

“Ok.” Nie Yan nodded. He planned to explore the interior of the grave. If he was going to die anyways, he might as well try to get something out of it.

It took over 20 seconds for Yao Yao to finish unequipping her gear, after which she found a way to commit suicide and return to Calore.

After she left, Nie Yan looked at Lil’ Gold. Without the support of Yao Yao’s area of effect magic, their mobbing speed would drop considerably.

Nie Yan redirected his attention to some guild affairs. This afternoon signalled the end of the five-day deadline between Asskickers United and Dragonsoar Financial Group. He ordered Bladelight, Young Seven, and the others to capture a Basic Stronghold by themselves. With a force of 500 strong, they succeeded after wiping seven times. Although the evil creatures guarding the strongholds gave ample amounts of experience, it still wasn’t enough to cover their losses. On average, each member dropped by 2 levels. But compared to the worth of a stronghold, this was a decent trade-off.

It wasn’t just Asskickers United. Other guilds were also hard at work clearing strongholds, but the losses they suffered in the process were far steeper.

Nie Yan looked at the vast sea of bones before him, waves of them moving around seemingly without purpose. Directing Lil' Gold, who could massacre entire groups of Undead Bone Hunters with his Dragon Breath, he steadily advanced.

Nie Yan arrived outside the entrance of Zennarde's Cenotaph. He could detect a dark energy radiating from its depths, giving a cold and gloomy feeling. Before him was a long flight of stairs that led deep underground.

Nie Yan descended the stairs along with Lil' Gold.

Carved into the walls on either side of the passage were simple murals depicting the history of the dragon race, from their abrupt rise in the Kanasi Mountain Range to their rapid occupation of the territories of other races, then finally the establishment of their empire, ruling over the entire Atlanta Continent.

As the saying went, nothing lasts forever. After dominating the continent for 2900 years, even King Zennarde grew old. In the fight for his inheritance, the ruling class tore itself apart. On top of that, the various races revolted against the dragons' atrocities, causing the Hiberyth Empire to fall into a sharp decline and never regain its former glory.

In the end, the nobility of the dragon race had no choice but to place Zennarde's Cenotaph in Zennarde's Domain. Otherwise, it would be destroyed by the other races.

The dragon race was nearly slaughtered to extinction while the



survivors were scattered all over the continent!

Even a powerful existence like the dragon race was ultimately wiped away from the slates of history.

As ancient legends like the one before Nie Yan seeped into both the civilization and various quests, they joined together to form the mystical world of Conviction.

Seeing these simple yet clear murals, Nie Yan felt like he was wandering through the rivers of history.

As Nie Yan travelled deeper into the tomb, the passage gradually grew more spacious. He guessed the ceiling was about 10 meters high, while a couple of meters to either side he was met with bones and skeletons along the wall. Some were human, others were elves, and still others were giants. All of them had fallen victim to a one-sided slaughter. Glowing pearls on the side of the walls lit up the passageway. Under the dim light, he saw several silhouettes flash by.

Nie Yan didn't know what sort of monsters lurked here. He entered stealth and went forward to investigate. Several figures appeared before his eyes—skeleton mages. Besides their black robes, all he could make out was the eerie green flames flickering in their otherwise empty eye sockets.

One of the skeleton mages suddenly turned around and stared in Nie Yan's direction.

Nie Yan held his breath. His entire body was hidden and merged with the darkness.

The skeleton mage searched around. But after not finding anything, it continued on its way.

Nie Yan inspected the skeleton mage with Transcendent Insight.

Skeleton Dragon Priest (Elite): Level 50

Health: 5,000/5,000

There were roughly 16 Skeleton Dragon Priests in this area. Could it be that his journey would end here?

Nie Yan wasn't willing to give up yet. He had already come so far. Besides, even if he decided to stop here, he would still have to die to escape this quest map. He might as well give it a shot. He unsummoned Lil' Gold, then walked into the room.

After Nie Yan activated the Crawler Ring, he began slowly climbing the walls like a house gecko. He hid in a corner that was the furthest away from the Skeleton Dragon Priests and slowly made his way to the other side with careful control over his every move.

While surrounded by so many enemies, Nie Yan didn't dare to behave rashly. He looked up ahead and saw two groups of Skeleton

Dragon Priests. Although this room was spacious, avoiding them would be extremely difficult.

A Skeleton Dragon Priest suddenly turned its head, staring straight at Nie Yan.

Nie Yan's heart jumped in fright. He had been discovered!

Then again, in a closed environment like this, it was hard not to be discovered.

The Skeleton Dragon Priest waved its staff and cast Ensnare!

If Nie Yan was immobilized, he would fall down.

However, he couldn't use any skills right now because he was on the wall!

Miss!

Nie Yan was caught off-guard but overjoyed by this unexpected development. However, why did the Skeleton Dragon Priest's Ensnare not work on him? He suddenly recalled a certain item, the Chapter of Peace! It had a passive skill that had a chance of nullifying any spell targeted at him!

The Chapter of Peace actually had such a life-saving use. Its value in his heart increased immensely. Sometimes this item could act as

a timely life-saver! Targeted spells like Ensnare or Petrifying Gaze from both players and monsters were very difficult to deal with. Because he possessed the Chapter of Peace, when encountering such dangers, his life could potentially be saved!

But he understood there was only a chance for it to activate. In all likelihood, he wouldn't be so lucky next time! Nie Yan flipped over and jumped off the stone wall. Landing gracefully on the floor, he perfectly executed Shadow Waltz to suddenly rush forward.

The Skeleton Dragon Priests sent over a dozen spells whizzing towards Nie Yan.

Nie Yan leaped out of the way in an attempt to dodge. While midair, he activated the Darkbright Barrier skill from his Darkbright Chestpiece.「Bang! Bang!」Two fireballs still managed to hit him.

-236

-224

What terrifying damage!

Fortunately, Nie Yan managed to avoid the vast majority of the attacks. Otherwise, this barrage would've easily sent him to his grave.

He quickly dashed toward the passage. Since he had already been discovered, he might as well make a break for it. The group of

Skeleton Dragon Priests attempted to intercept him, sending numerous spells flying in his direction.

Fireballs flew all over the place with dozens of projectiles being launched in each wave!

As Nie Yan made his escape, nasty sizzles sounded out repeatedly as he was hit by one fireball after another. However, he wasn't instantly killed by the barrage but instead bravely withstood the Skeleton Dragon Priests' spells to make his way to the next room.

In the instant before the next barrage of spells hit him, marking his imminent demise, Nie Yan activated the God's Blessing skill from the Chapter of Peace, becoming immune to all magic!

## Chapter 290 – Zennarde's Sword

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Since the Chapter of Peace was guaranteed to drop upon death, Nie Yan decided to take advantage of its God's Blessing skill while he still could. He might even come out of here alive by some stroke of luck!

God's Blessing had a duration of 60 seconds. During this time, Nie Yan wouldn't have to fear any magic.

After downing a Haste Potion he got from the Starry Night Potion Shop, Nie Yan fled for his life while brushing off the bombardment of spells. With only 10 seconds remaining on God's Blessing, he bolted past the last group of Skeleton Dragon Priests and escaped through the passage to the next room. He found a dark corner to duck into and disappeared into the shadows.

The Skeleton Dragon Priests chased after Nie Yan into the passageway. But after finding no signs of him, they turned around and left.

Nie Yan breathed out a sigh of relief. He left his hiding spot and continued travelling deeper into the tomb. Much to his dismay, the next room he arrived at contained nearly six times as many Skeleton Dragon Priests. He had no idea how to deal with so many Elite-class monsters.

These Skeleton Dragon Priests completely barred Nie Yan's path forward.

“How do I get past this room...?” Nie Yan muttered. He surveyed his surroundings and confirmed that this room didn’t differ much from the last in design, meaning sneaking past these Skeleton Dragon Priests would be next to impossible. Taking them out one by one was another route he could take. After all, with his outstanding gear and wide array of skills, disposing of a Level 50 Skeleton Dragon Priest would be a piece of cake.

However, in front of him were over 70 Skeleton Dragon Priests with even more further up ahead.

Even with the Silk Spinner Ring and Crawler Ring in his possession, Nie Yan had no way of sneaking past them.

While Nie Yan was pondering his next step, one of the Skeleton Dragon Priests split off from the group and began wandering in his direction. In its idle state, it alternated between moving around and stopping to survey its surroundings.

It got closer and closer to Nie Yan. Only a few more steps and it would discover him!

There was a large crowd of Skeleton Dragon Priests only 20 meters up ahead. If they were all alerted of his presence, Nie Yan would be left without a corpse!

His only option was to take out this Skeleton Dragon Priest as quickly as possible!

Nie Yan gritted his teeth and activated Gale Ambush. He dashed forward with an explosive burst of speed and plunged his dagger deep into the Skeleton Dragon Priest's chest. After which he circled around and followed up with Cut Throat.

Nie Yan's speed reached its absolute limit thanks to the 200% bonus from Gale Ambush.

Gale Ambush increased damage by 60% and ignored armour and level difference. Combined with the Advanced Demon Hunter title which reduced the stats of all nearby undead by 30%, Nie Yan dealt massive damage.

Before the Skeleton Dragon Priest could react, Nie Yan had brought it down to almost half health.

The Skeleton Dragon Priest began casting, a sphere of light condensing in its palm. But before it could retaliate, Nie Yan temporarily delayed it with a swift kick to the shoulder.

Nie Yan threw himself back at the Skeleton Dragon Priest and struck out with Backstab and Eviscerate.

Just as the Skeleton Dragon Priest was about to unleash its magic, Nie Yan activated Blast and finished it off with a loud explosion.

The ruckus alerted the crowd of Skeleton Dragon Priests up ahead. As they turned their heads to look over, all they saw was a



black robe and scattered bone fragments on the ground. Nie Yan was nowhere to be found.

These undead lacked the intelligence to wonder how their comrade ended up in such a state. Without a target, they would remain idle, leaving Nie Yan safe for the time being.

Nie Yan returned to the corner. He relaxed his breathing after seeing the Skeleton Dragon Priests turn their gazes away. Had he not acted with such resolve, he would be facing a calamity right now!

Taking down a single Skeleton Dragon Priest wasn't enough to allow Nie Yan to get through this area, nor did he have the luxury of waiting all day for them to split off from their groups, allowing him to pick them off one at a time.

“Is there nothing else I can do?” Nie Yan scanned through the list of skills and items available to him before his gaze settled on the Pearl of Disguise. “Maybe I really can sneak past these Skeleton Dragon Priests if I disguise myself as one of them!”

After a moment, Nie Yan made his decision. He could think of no other way.

Nie Yan activated Disguise, and his body was instantly shrouded by a black robe. His face concealed beneath the robe turned skeletal while flickering green orbs emerged in his eye sockets.

He looked identical to a Skeleton Dragon Priest!

The Disguise skill was quite impressive. Nie Yan examined his body and confirmed that the transformation was complete. Every part of his body had turned into a skeleton!

Nie Yan didn't know if the Skeleton Dragon Priests could see through his disguise, or if there was a safe distance and what it was. So he decided it best to stay as far away from them as he possibly could.

What awaited Nie Yan if he was caught was an endless barrage of spells. Later, he would awake in the Calore graveyard.

Nie Yan took a deep breath, then began walking towards the Skeleton Dragon Priests in the distance. He even perfectly mimicked their gait. This way, his cover was less likely to get blown.

Nie Yan silently prayed that the Skeleton Dragon Priests didn't possess any skills like Eye of Truth; otherwise, he was toast.

Nie Yan slowly approached the Skeleton Dragon Priests. At about five meters, he could clearly make out their faces under the robes. Their bone-white, skeletal appearances were extremely off-putting.

Even though Nie Yan couldn't see his own face. He reckoned it didn't differ much from these Skeleton Dragon Priests.

This was the effect of Disguise!

Nie Yan lowered his head. He saw a pair of hands that were mostly bone with a bit of mummified muscle and tendons attached to them.

These were his hands!

He firmly grasped his staff as he advanced. He was only a short distance away from the Skeleton Dragon Priests.

Nie Yan felt like his heart was going to jump out of his chest as he got closer and closer to them. I'm done for if I expose myself now! Calm down! He forcefully composed himself, then continued onward.

Several Skeleton Dragon Priests looked over at Nie Yan. They stared at his face for what seemed like an eternity before finally turning away.

None of the Skeleton Dragon Priests noticed anything off about Nie Yan.

Nie Yan felt reassured as he slowly snuck past the groups of Skeleton Dragon Priests without being noticed. When he reached the end of the room, he breathed out a sigh of relief. This sort of activity truly tested the limits of a person's mental fortitude.

Nie Yan took advantage of his disguise to travel deeper into the tomb. He bumped into Skeleton Dragon Priests in every room and corridor. If a player hadn't reached Level 70 or didn't possess any special methods, there was no way they could make it this far by themselves!

Nie Yan used the Pearl of Disguise to make it through the areas that were littered with Skeleton Dragon Priests. After travelling for another half an hour, he exited a long, narrow passageway and arrived in a room significantly hotter than the others. Below was a lake of boiling lava while ahead was a stone arch bridge that stretched past the haze of volcanic gas.

Nie Yan spotted a statue towering over the lava in the distance. It was roughly 70 meters tall and resembled a titan of antiquity. Clad in golden armour and sporting a pair of giant wings, it was a spectacular sight to behold.

This was a statue of Dragon King Zennarde in his prime! Brimming with muscle, he appeared domineering with a murderous countenance that inspired fear to all.

Slaughterer of all beings, the indisputable tyrant throughout the ages!

His establishment of the Hiberyth Empire and subsequent reign was known as the Dark Era! For all other races, it was the darkest time in their history!

The statue's right hand was placed in front of its chest with its

palm facing upward. Its immense palm was large enough to fit six people. Floating just about a meter above the center of the palm was a pitch-black short sword. It was covered in a blazing black flame.

Zennarde's Sword was roughly the same size as an ordinary one-handed sword. It was entirely black, shrouded in an otherworldly flame.

Since Zennarde's Sword was so high up, Nie Yan couldn't get a good look at it. However, it immediately drew his attention. In this expansive room, it was undoubtedly the focal point.

This was a frightening weapon that took millions of lives, but also a legendary weapon that countless people drooled over.

Nie Yan stared at the treasure that was so close, yet so far away. Even though he was fully aware of the danger, he had an urge to charge up ahead.

Nie Yan walked over the stone bridge. A dense noxious cloud of smoke rose up from the boiling pit of lava below, carrying along with it waves of heat and even smoldering flames. The burning smoke enveloped him, lingering for a long while, before gradually extinguishing.

Despite being burned by the smoke, Nie Yan was still unscathed.

Nie Yan possessed the Kilnfire Heart, making his fire resistance

extremely high. Even a Level 80 player wasn't necessarily a match for him in this regard. So the environmental hazards here had no effect on him. These clouds of smoke only dealt 50 points of damage at most.

Ahead of him was a 10 meter wide river of lava. Nie Yan searched for a long time but he couldn't find a bridge to the other side.

The lava below boiled and roiled. From time to time, gas bubbles would explode, sending waves of heat rising into the air.

After considering his options, Nie Yan equipped the Leaper Ring. He leaped over the lava and landed safely on the other side

Nie Yan gazed into the distance. He was one step closer to the statue at the center.

There was still roughly 60 meters to go!

There was a vast sea of lava ahead of him. Wanting to obtain Zennarde's Sword wouldn't be an easy task.

Nie Yan wondered how the people in the previous timeline reached Zennarde's Sword or how many of them were engulfed by the boiling lava.

Nie Yan felt his expectations for Zennarde's Sword soar. It was definitely on par with the Grimmar Soul Staff!

Nie Yan's eyes swept over the ground in the distance. To his shock, he discovered a person hung up on a giant cross, about eight meters above the lava. The hanged man looked quite large and muscular.

Because it was so far away, Nie Yan couldn't see this person clearly. However, for an NPC to appear in this place, and to be strung up on a cross no less, they were definitely related to Zennarde's Sword and the quest in this map.

It was hard to tell if this NPC was still alive.

Nie Yan thought for a moment before decisively walking over.

# Chapter 291 – Barbarian Kelowitz

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Nie Yan trekked over to the NPC strewn up on the cross and examined him. He was far taller than an ordinary person, with a robust physique that glowed a healthy bronze. The lower half of his body was covered by a pair of ragged fur trousers while his upper body was bare. Despite his sorry appearance, he brimmed with power akin to a ferocious beast.

From these distinctive traits, Nie Yan identified this NPC as a Barbarian!

Barbarians were a race of humans gifted with immense physical strength. They specialized in melee combat, often wrestling with beasts in the forest to hone their various techniques. Battle was practically in their blood.

Barbarians were a famous group of people. Although their population never exceeded 2,000, countless Champions were birthed from their tribe, some of whom even became legendary existences such as the God of War Kelo.

Nie Yan stood roughly 30 meters away from this Barbarian. It appeared he had been hung up on the cross for quite a while. His hair fell well past his shoulders, covering his face and preventing others from making out his expression.

Nie Yan had encountered a few Barbarians in his past life. They were powerful and well-respected NPCs who acted as the cornerstones of strength in every battle, slaughtering numerous



creatures of darkness. Their feats were often spoken highly about in the Hilton Stronghold.

Nie Yan discovered this Barbarian was firmly nailed in place by metal spikes through his hands and feet, leaving him unable to move an inch. As if that wasn't enough, his wrists and ankles were bound in chains and shackles.

It was impossible for this Barbarian to break free in such a state.

Sensing another presence, the Barbarian raised his head to stare at Nie Yan. His deep black eyes were piercing and full of life.

Nie Yan inspected the Barbarian with Transcendent Insight.

Barbarian Kelowitz (Lord): Level 360

Health: ???

Nie Yan was shocked. Generally, NPCs over Level 300 were existences similar to legendary figures like Karsi. But he feared even Karsi might not necessarily be a match for this fellow in level.

“Youngster, what are you doing here?” Barbarian Kelowitz asked. His deep, husky voice carried a serenity unlike any other.

“I was just exploring,” Nie Yan replied innocently. He remained

unflinching under Barbarian Kelowitz's intent gaze, which was akin to a sharp blade.

Even while bound to the cross, Barbarian Kelowitz still radiated matchless might.

Barbarian Kelowitz cracked an appreciative smile. "Youngster, you're still but an infant, but you have great willpower." He lazily glanced at the flowing lava around him. "I've been imprisoned in here, this damned place, for close to 1000 years."

Nie Yan's expression flickered in surprise. This was probably a trigger for a quest!

"Do you need my help?"

Barbarian Kelowitz gazed at Nie Yan for a moment. With a faint smile, he gently shook his head. "Youngster, you're far too weak. It's impossible for you to free me. It would require someone with a Holy Spirit Heart to pull out Zennarde's Sword to unlock these restraints."

Nie Yan's mind trembled. In the previous timeline, a player had probably reached this place and heard something similar from Barbarian Kelowitz. Subsequently, the information about Zennarde's Sword leaked to the outside.

However, these rumours were never corroborated by the official website.

This quest probably had a very high level requirement and involved buried secrets of the Atlanta continent, neither of which the players had obtained in the previous timeline. So the official website never made any relevant information public.

“What must I do to obtain a Holy Spirit Heart?” Nie Yan asked. In the previous timeline, a Holy Spirit Heart was a distant legend. Those in possession of one could be counted on a single hand.

“Paladins are gifted beings with a straightforward path to obtain a Holy Spirit Heart. For other classes, although it isn’t impossible, it would be as difficult as ascending the heavens,” Barbarian Kelowitz answered. He gazed at Nie Yan’s resolute expression, then revealed a self-mocking smile. “I don’t know why—maybe because I’ve gone senile from being holed up here for far too long—but my gut tells me you can do it. Youngster, are you willing to unseal Zennarde’s Sword and use it to sever these accursed chains?”

Will you accept Barbarian Kelowitz’ request? Time Limit: 5 months. Failure will result in the loss of 10 levels.

Nie Yan thought for a moment, then pressed confirm. The penalty was nothing particularly grave in his opinion. There was no harm in accepting this quest. However, he still had some doubts regarding Zennarde’s Sword. Could he really obtain it?

Even if he had to die again and again, it would all be worth it if he

could obtain Zennarde's Sword! A mythical treasure like this was simply too great to pass up on.

You have accepted Barbarian Kelowitz' Request.

You have received Barbarian Kelowitz' Blessing.

Barbarian Kelowitz' Blessing: Suppress the might of evil.  
Duration: 5 months.

Why did I get this blessing? What is it for? Nie Yan was dazed for a moment. He gazed up at Zennarde's Sword floating above the palm of the statue. This godly weapon had been sealed there for nearly 1000 years. It contained a mysterious power that appeared to transcend both space and time. Suppress the might of evil... could it be referring to Zennarde's Sword?

"But how do I obtain a Holy Spirit Heart?" Nie Yan hurriedly asked. The Holy Spirit Heart was the most important part.

"No need to worry." Barbarian Kelowitz chuckled. He chanted a series of syllables as a blaze of light enshrouded Nie Yan. "I once received the blessing of God, making me the only Barbarian who can wield magic. With it, I blessed you. As for whether you can

obtain a Holy Spirit Heart, that will depend on yourself.”

Nie Yan checked his status and discovered a new skill.

Purifying Aura: Wield the power of light to purify all evil creatures within a 5-meter radius.

A Holy Spirit Heart could be obtained by purifying countless evil creatures. As for the exact number, Nie Yan had no clue. However, he was certain it wasn't low. How else could there have been only three Paladins with Holy Spirit Hearts in the previous timeline?

“Kelowitz, sir, thank you for the blessing,” Nie Yan said. It appeared it would be a long time before he could come back here to rescue this barbarian.

Barbarian Kelowitz appeared slightly out of breath after granting the blessing. “Please remember the task I entrusted you with. If you would like to leave this place, I can still muster open a teleportal for you.”

“Hold on, please. Kelowitz, sir. Would it be possible for me to take away Zennarde's Sword?” Nie Yan asked. He gazed at the sword hovering in the distance.

“Go fetch Zennarde's Sword first,” Barbarian Kelowitz replied.

An ordinary person couldn't reach such a high place. Nie Yan reckoned that the lucky fellow who stumbled upon this place in the previous time initially had no way of reaching the sword. So they could only return to the city and think of a way to overcome this obstacle. When they returned with an item such as a Levitation Ring, they could take Zennarde's Sword away.

"Sure, I can climb up there," Nie Yan said. He grew excited after Barbarian Kelowitz agreed to his request.

"Zennarde's Sword was sealed after the death of Zennarde. Its current power isn't even a fraction of what it once was," Barbarian Kelowitz said.

From Nie Yan's experience, the properties of legendary pieces of gear like this one were unmatched even when sealed.

Nie Yan conjectured the reason Barbarian Kelowitz granted him a blessing that suppressed evil was precisely so that he could wield Zennarde's Sword!

Aside from daggers, Thieves could also equip short swords!

Nie Yan thought for a bit before becoming impatient. He glanced at his Crawler Ring. Since he hadn't used it in a while, it was off cooldown.

Nie Yan bid farewell to Barbarian Kelowitz, then made his way to the distant statue. He jumped on the statue, his body bracing

against it as he climbed. After a few minutes, he had gone from the feet to the chest. From there, he shot out a web line from his Silk Spinner Ring and swung himself over 15 meters through the air before smacking into the arm. He wrapped himself tightly around it before hastily crawling towards the statue's palm.

Before long, he reached its hand. Standing on a relatively flat part of its palm, he could see Zennarde's Sword right before him. A black flame covered the sword, its tongues leaping wildly into the air.

Nie Yan approached Zennarde's Sword.

The slender short sword was about a meter long and pitch-black. A lifelike serpent was engraved in the hilt, almost as if it were about to strike. The blade itself was like black crystal, pure and translucent, with a razor-sharp barb curving out from each side. The whole thing glinted with a bloody light, exuding a baleful sword aura.

You have discovered Dragon King Zennarde's Sword. It possesses an extremely powerful evil energy. Legend has it that users who cannot suppress the evil energy will be devoured by the sword instead.

It was just like Nie Yan had surmised. If a player wanted to take away Zennarde's Sword, they would need to have Barbarian Kelowitz's blessing!

Nie Yan walked up to Zennarde's Sword and wrapped his hand

around the hilt. A powerful dark energy surged up his arm and into his body, causing him to feel a chill. However, immediately after, his body radiated a brilliant light. A warm, holy energy permeated his body and forced the dark energy back.



# Chapter 292 – Sword of Slaughter

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The black flames around Zennarde's Sword flared erratically, causing Nie Yan to feel like his hands were burning up. He heard a voice whispering in his mind. But when he tried to listen closely, it disappeared without a trace.

Most Legendary weapons represented the legacies of powerful ancient figures, sometimes even developing a spirit of their own.

Nie Yan didn't find this strange at all.

For example, Zennarde's Sword carried the memory of its original owner and experienced the Dark Era.

Just as Nie Yan brought Zennarde's Sword closer to check its properties, ghastly cries rang in his ears. His vision swam as countless malignant souls swarmed toward him. A cold and gloomy energy invaded his body and sought to devour him, causing him to narrowly fall into a panic. However, he quickly realized they were just illusions, accumulated resentment given form after the slaughter of millions of lives. So long as his mind was resolute, he wouldn't be affected.

Nie Yan took a deep breath, then calmly gazed at his surroundings. The spirits lingered around for a while. But after realizing they could do nothing to him, they vanished like a wisp of smoke.

As Nie Yan firmly grasped onto the rough textured handle of

Zennarde's Sword, it let out a low hum and struggled for a while before finally settling down.

After swinging Zennarde's Sword around a few times, Nie Yan felt it was a bit too large for his liking. But as soon as this thought surfaced, the sword shrunk to a more comfortable size, its black flames still burning ever so vigorously.

The faint runes engraved along the fuller of Zennarde's Sword sealed much of its power. He would need to obtain a Holy Spirit Heart before hoping to remove them as well as the corrosive miasma surrounding the sword.

Before removing the seal, Barbarian Kelowitz's Blessing sufficed in suppressing the evil energy. As Nie Yan gazed at Zennarde's Sword, he whispered, "I finally have a godly weapon of my own."

Nie Yan examined the properties of Zennarde's Sword.

### Sealed Zennarde's Sword (Godly Legendary)

Nightmare Curse of the Dead: Reduces the player's stats by 50%. (Effect halved by Barbarian Kelowitz's Blessing)

Description: A godly weapon created by Kallander and imbued with the dark magic power of Dragon King Zennarde. Failing to subdue to the evil energy within Zennarde's Sword will result in a fatal backlash. Six Divine Seals were placed on this sword by the God of War Kelo.

Properties: Attack 630–636, Critical +30, 10% chance to deal 500% Critical Damage, Ignore Level +12, Ignore Armour.

Hell Execution: Chance to instantly execute an enemy when their health falls below 20%. Success rate is determined by level difference and defense. Energy Cost: 100 Cooldown: 5 seconds.

Apocalyptic Extinction (Junior): Inflict the enemy with 5 types of Curses: Weaken, Cripple, Disease, Fear, and Corrode. Duration: 3 minutes. Cooldown: 1 hour.

Restrictions: None

-Creator: Kallander

Despite being suppressed by the six Divine Seals of the God of War Kelo, Zennarde's Sword was still ludicrously powerful. Its attack power was even higher than that of a Level 50 Dark Gold weapon. Its other properties were nothing to scoff at either, especially the two skills: Hell Execution and Apocalyptic Extinction.

The Nightmare Curse of the Dead wasn't something an ordinary player could bear. Even with Barbarian Kelowitz's Blessing halving the effects of the curse, a 25% reduction in all stats was still quite harsh. It was tantamount to the player sacrificing a large portion of their health and defense to wield great power.

Fortunately, Nie Yan possessed the Glimpse of Darkness which greatly increased his stats, so a 25% reduction in all stats was no skin off his back. Even though he wouldn't be as durable, his damage would soar, allowing him to take down opponents even quicker.

For every seal Nie Yan removed, more of Zennarde's Sword's power would be unlocked until it was restored to its original state, a true godly weapon!

However, what exactly was a Godly Legendary item?

Nie Yan searched the official website and found an information page regarding the topic. It explained that Godly Legendaries were a sub-category of Legendaries. There were several types of Legendaries. The most common were ordinary Legendaries; items like Nie Yan's Shadow of Sulgata belonged in this category. Less common were Legendary Sets such as the Grimmar Set. These generally had somewhat better stats than ordinary Legendaries. Finally, above them were Godly Legendaries. These were often created by Legendary Blacksmiths, and had their creator's name labelled on them. Throughout the history of the Atlanta continent, there were only a handful of Blacksmiths who could create items of such quality: Kallander, Bloem, Hilda, Klump, and Talmacs. These Blacksmiths belonged to the Elves, Humans, Dwarves, and Dragons. The Godly Legendaries they created were used by countless powerful figures throughout history, changing hands from person to person. Zennarde's Sword was one of them.

Nie Yan recalled how Zennarde's Sword obtained its reputation because it was used by Dragon King Zennarde. He started dreaming of the unimaginable power he would hold when he removed the final seal on the sword. But even now, it was hard to imagine that any player could find a weapon to rival his.

Nie Yan equipped Zennarde's Sword as his primary weapon while

switching Splitting Edge to his off-hand. Zennarde's Sword had shrunk quite a bit. It was roughly the size of an ordinary dagger, so it didn't stand out.

From his past life to the present, this was Nie Yan's first time using a short sword.

Combat-orientated Thieves generally favoured short swords because their attack was higher and they had a bit more range, while stealth-orientated Thieves preferred daggers. Nie Yan belonged to the latter group. However, with a powerful short sword like Zennarde's Sword in his possession, it would be a waste not to use it.

With Zennarde's Sword in hand, Nie Yan leapt off the palm of the statue and activated the Featherfall Jewel, whereupon he gently landed on the ground.

As Nie Yan walked back, he felt Barbarian Kelowitz somewhat resembled the God of War Kelo. Was there some sort of connection? After all, their names did have some similarities.

"You've retrieved Zennarde's Sword. I hope you use it well. Remember, a weapon, no matter how powerful, is merely a tool. It is neither inherently good nor evil. That is decided by the owner." Barbarian Kelowitz glanced at the weapon in Nie Yan's hands, then continued, "I hope you'll purify this sword of slaughter."

Nie Yan nodded in understanding. Gazing at Barbarian Kelowitz, he asked, "Kelowitz, sir, there's something that's been bugging me

in the back of my mind ever since you introduced yourself. I hope you can answer my question.”

“Ask away,” Barbarian Kelowitz replied with a smile. Despite being bound by chains and nailed to a cross, he still maintained a calm bearing. Were it an ordinary person, they would’ve long since lost their mind.

“The God of War Kelo, that’s you, isn’t it?” Nie Yan asked. It was highly likely that Kelowitz was called the God of War Kelo in the outside world. To be imprisoned here for nearly a thousand years without dying, even if he wasn’t a god, he should be pretty close to one.

“God of War Kelo is but a mundane title. When you reach a certain threshold, the masses will start worshiping you as a god,” Barbarian Kelowitz answered with a mild expression.

Hearing these words, Nie Yan understood that Barbarian Kelowitz had implicitly admitted to being the God of War Kelo!

“Zennarde captured me, but he had no way of destroying my Divinity and killing me, so he ended up imprisoning me here instead. If I count how much time has passed, I’d say It’s been almost a thousand years,” Barbarian Kelowitz said.

“Divinity?” Nie Yan asked in a puzzled tone. This was his first time hearing about such a term. Then again, God-like existences in Conviction were pretty rare in the first place.

“Divinity is a gift bestowed by God. No matter how many times you die, you will always revive,” Barbarian Kelowitz explained.

Nie Yan chuckled. Going by that description, wouldn't it mean all players possessed Divinity? Of course, the rules for NPCs and players were different.

Barbarian Kelowitz was the God of War Kelo. With this, everything made sense. He was locked up here because he had lost to Zennarde in that decisive battle during the Dark Era.

The only thing that left Nie Yan puzzled was why the God of War Kelo didn't die. Why was it that Dragon King Zennarde, who was much more powerful, ultimately passed away because he couldn't escape the corrosion of time.

However, this would forever remain a mystery, and Nie Yan couldn't be bothered to inquire. After all, these matters had no relation to his direct benefit.

Barbarian Kelowitz created a magical circle with a wave of his hand, causing a portal that stood about three meters tall to appear out of thin air. It would send Nie Yan directly back to the outside world.

“This portal will send you to a human city. When you obtain a Holy Spirit Heart, return. Hurry up and leave this place. Every 7 days, this volcano will erupt with lava. The next eruption is probably just a few hours away. Youngster, I wish you a safe journey!” Barbarian Kelowitz said.

Seeing as he probably wouldn't be getting anything else, although obtaining Zennarde's Sword was already amazing enough, Nie Yan bid farewell to Barbarian Kelowitz, then stepped into the portal.



## Chapter 293 – Stronghold Infrastructure

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When Nie Yan opened his eyes, he was back in the outside world. After sweeping his eyes over the nearby buildings, he recognized his current location as Glory City. Why was I teleported here? He noticed a teleportation mark on his wrist which pulsed with a mysterious power. It would allow him to open up a portal and return to Barbarian Kelowitz's location at any time. However, it was only one-time use.

Nie Yan suddenly noticed a crowd of players staring at him in shock.

Nie Yan followed their gazes to Zennarde's Sword in his hand. Gleaming with a gaudy light, its black flames burned fiercely. This was a fire enchanted sword! Even if Nie Yan hid the special effects, the reaction would still be the same. The pitch-black blade was translucent like crystal with a sharp barb curving out from the side.

This was the first time they had ever seen such a striking short sword.

“Damn, what kind of sword is that?”

“Who knows? I've never seen one like that before!”

“Wait! Isn't that the guild leader of Asskickers United, Nirvana Flame? Why would he be all the way out here in Glory City?”

“I don’t know. Isn’t his guild Asskickers United at odds with Bloodlust Blades? Why did he walk into the lion’s den?”

Nie Yan remained unperturbed by these comments. This wasn’t his first trip to Glory City, nor would it be his last. He strapped Zennarde’s Sword to his waist, then started walking towards the transfer area.

「You’re finally out.」Guo Huai messaged Nie Yan after seeing his current location appear as Glory City.

Nie Yan chuckled.「How’s the growth of our guild been lately? What about the other guilds?」

「We’ve cleared out three strongholds so far, but haven’t yet decided on how to arrange them since we’ve been awaiting your input. As for the others. Holy Empire is in control of two while Victorious Return, Radiant Sacred Flame, and Sapphire Shrine have one each. Bloodlust Blades has already captured five, and both Alliance of Mages and Divine Protectors have three. Meanwhile in Hilderlocke, Battle Crazy Alliance has occupied two,」Guo Huai replied. With great difficulty, Asskickers United had caught up to the middle of the pack. However, since their strongholds were still undeveloped, they were lagging further behind Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors every second.

「Did you watch the video I sent you?」Guo Huai asked.

「Yeah,」Nie Yan replied. It was a video of one of Bloodlust Blade's recently captured strongholds which was quickly taking shape. With many merchants settling down, business was starting to flourish. Their operations were quite successful.

「We should speed things up on our side too,」Guo Huai urged. Bloodlust Blades was stationed in the neighbouring Glory City. They would definitely be setting their sights on Calore next. It would mean serious trouble for Asskickers United if they allied with Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame!

Guilds would generally relocate their headquarters to a stronghold they captured. From then on, their actions would be closely tied to that stronghold. If they failed to defend it, letting the enemy run amuck in their headquarters, the guild would drop by two levels.

Asskickers United would have to put up solid defenses to protect their strongholds, especially the one they chose to house their guild headquarters. Later on, if the Dragonsoar Financial Group earned enough profit from Asskickers United, they would invest even more capital into the guild. This would create a continuous cycle that would cement their shared interests; Asskickers United would receive their money, while the Dragonsoar Financial Group would rake in money from businesses they opened in the strongholds. Once that happened, they would be so intertwined that if Asskickers United fell, the financial consortium would also have their supply chains cut off by other corporations.

The political atmosphere of the game was slowly taking shape with various factions and alliances starting to solidify.

「I'll be at the stronghold in just a moment,」Nie Yan said. After capturing strongholds, most guilds would spend their time fortifying them, so war wasn't likely to break out for the time being.

Nie Yan teleported to Calore, then departed the city.

Asskickers United's first stronghold was located on the border of Violet Dream Forest halfway up a mountain. It was perched high atop the land, making it easy to defend. After receiving Nie Yan's permission, Guo Huai had relocated their guild headquarters here.

Nie Yan decided to name the stronghold United City, taking the second word from their guild's name.

Nie Yan rode through the wilderness on horseback. He could see United City in the distance. It was perched high atop a mountain, covering roughly 2000 by 2000 meters. The perimeter of the stronghold was fortified by over 30 meter tall walls. Although there weren't many buildings inside, he could foresee it becoming a grand fortress city in the future.

In the previous timeline, this had been Radiant Sacred Flame's primary stronghold. It was incredibly difficult to siege, repelling the attacks of Holy Empire time and time again.

But in this life, the stronghold had a different owner. Nie Yan planned to make it a genuine impregnable stronghold!

Nie Yan rode his Faulkner Warhorse into the stronghold. As he gazed around, he saw a few tattered buildings scattered here and there. Merely used for resting by the previous monster occupants, the buildings looked like a simple breeze could knock them over. All of this would have to be torn down if they were going to remodel this place.

There were several thousand guild members guarding the stronghold. When they noticed Nie Yan, they came forth to greet him.

“Guild Leader!”

“Hey, Boss!”

Nie Yan gazed up ahead. Several people were walking towards him, Guo Huai, Resplendent Bladelight, Aqua Smoke Stub, and a few others.

“You’re here. Come, take a look at the blueprint we drew up,” Guo Huai said.

Nie Yan smiled at the group of players, then gazed at Smoke Stub who appeared to be in high spirits. He had risen to Level 45 and was clad in silver armour.

“Back to where you were at before?” Nie Yan asked. It seemed Smoke Stub had been doing pretty well for himself.

“Yep. With Bladelight, Painted Muslin, and the others helping, I got my gear quality back to what it was before in no time!” Smoke Stub replied with a smile. During this time, the former members of Withered Leaf had slowly raised their strength. Even though they were no longer members of the Tuoba organization, employees with a steady income, they could still accept jobs through the Union of Assassins and earn a decent living.

“How’s the financial situation of your new organization? If there’s anything you need, feel free to ask for help,” Nie Yan said. Smoke Stub was already a loyal member of Asskickers United. If he was in a pickle, the guild wouldn’t just stand idly by.

“We’re doing okay. After we got some decent gear, it was business like usual. We gave all the money we earned to Wood Grace to invest. We’ve made quite a bit. Right now, our financial situation is already greatly improved. I estimate in the next five or six days, we can pay back our debts in full, then we’ll be back in the black,” Smoke Stub said. After being cleaned out of everything they owned, they didn’t have that much debt remaining, only that all the money they had saved over the years had vanished like a puff of smoke. Despite this, it wasn’t the end of the world. It just meant they would have to start over from scratch.

“That’s good to hear.” Nie Yan nodded. He received the blueprints from Guo Huai. It showed where all the various shops, roads, and districts were going to be placed, including the location of the guild headquarters.

Nie Yan compared the blueprints with some successful

stronghold layouts from his past life, then made a few adjustments.

“Since this stronghold is tied to the prosperity of our guild, a single wall won’t suffice. There need to be at least three placed side by side with some space in between them. The gates can’t be located in the same spots either. Otherwise, the enemy can just charge in.” Nie Yan proposed his first change.

If the enemy broke through the first gate, they would only run into a wall. They would have to travel a long way to reach the second gate. After breaking through the second gate, the enemy would be met with the third wall, and then they would have to go all the way back around to get to the third gate. Like this, the time it would take the enemy to break into the stronghold would be greatly extended. Large crossbows would be set up on the top of the walls, along with Mages, and the passages between the walls could be filled with Warriors. If the enemy didn’t have siege weapons like catapults or trebuchets, it would be impossible for them to invade the stronghold.

Guo Huai’s eyes lit up. “Great idea, like this our defenses will be bolstered quite a bit!”

“These ideas are pretty creative.” Smoke Stub nodded in admiration.

Bladelight and the others also greatly approved of Nie Yan’s ideas.

“Furthermore, the transfer point needs to be relocated. Turn the rear of the stronghold into a business district. After all, the Dragonsoar Financial Group is our backer. We need to ensure their benefits inside the game. Also I have a Junior Energy Core from Everlasting City. It can be used to create a barrier for the stronghold,” Nie Yan continued. Like this, the stronghold would be incredibly difficult to lay siege to.

After finalizing the plans, everyone got to work.

After the Dragonsoar Financial Group’s investment, Asskickers United had ample gold to spare for construction. Nie Yan began remodeling the stronghold. Three walls were erected around the perimeter of the stronghold, each taller than the last. This way, the players on top of the walls could all fire toward the outside.

If a fourth or even fifth wall were erected, not only would it be ineffective, it would also reduce the space available for them to use.

A towering building was erected at the center of the stronghold. This was the guild headquarters. The transfer point was placed here. It was connected to the guild branch in Calore. If there was any problem, guild members could teleport to the headquarters and quickly provide assistance. Afterwards, a network of streets and paths were built, branching out all the way to the walls of the stronghold. The business district was established in a safe area in the rear. A Tier 1 Siege Machine Factory, Mage Tower, and War God Statue, and a few other structures were constructed near the front of the stronghold. The Siege Machine Factory could make various siege weapons such as heavy crossbows. At higher ranks,



catapults could be crafted. The Mage Tower gave Mages a boost in magic power. The War God Statue provided Warriors an increase in attack power, though it was only 3% at Tier 1. In the later stages of the game, there would be even more useful buildings. In addition, there was also housing to take care of. Each house could support a certain number of people. During a siege battle, the number of houses determined the amount of players that could participate in protecting the stronghold.

Under Nie Yan's guidance, rows upon rows of buildings were erected, stretching out as far as the eye could see. Soon there were several hundred buildings in the stronghold. All that was lacking now was people.

## Chapter 294 – Faded

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Nie Yan installed about 10 Lookouts on top of the walls. When the Siege Machine Factory was up and running, the Lookouts could be mounted with Crossbow Turrets. A Tier 1 Lookout could be fitted with more than a dozen of them, and since they could be operated by anyone, it was ideal to man them with low-level players. They were a formidable line of defense.

As the primary stronghold of Asskickers United, United City's strategic benefit far outweighed anything else. So long as it remained standing, Asskickers United would never fall.

Nie Yan estimated he had spent roughly 6,000 gold on remodeling United City. Luckily, he had just received another payment from the Dragonsoar Financial Group, which was enough to cover these costs.

“We'll leave the handling of the business district to Yu Rui. I want to open up a Starry Night Potion Shop branch here as well. Also, start leasing out the empty shops,” Nie Yan instructed. For United City to grow, a thriving commerce was necessary. As a guild grew more powerful, so did investor confidence, making it easier to attract prospective businesses to set up shop in their strongholds. Considering Asskickers United's prestige and rallying power in Calore, it would be a piece of cake to develop the stronghold.

With the real-world business district being handed over to them, the Dragonsoar Financial Group had received their first return on investment from Asskickers United.

“I’ll get right on to it. I’ve already appointed 15 supervisors to oversee the economy of this stronghold. Furthermore, I want you to go over our contingency plan. In case of emergency, who will arrive to defend the stronghold, how many will come, all of that needs to be decided beforehand. We only have 100 Tier 1 Barracks, so if war breaks out, we can only accommodate 5,000 players at most. I estimate with our construction of the walls, and the Lookouts on top of them, we’ll have roughly 30 minutes to get reinforcements into place,” Guo Huai said as he handed over some plans to Nie Yan.

Nie Yan skimmed through them, then asked, “How many of the Mages assigned to defending the stronghold can cast Advanced Magic?”

“We have five in total: Summer Bug, Undying Scoundrel, Sunny South, Beginner Student, and Nimbus,” Guo Huai replied. It was evident they sorely lacked Mages who could cast Advanced Magic.

Nie Yan wondered how Yao Yao was doing with the Karsi’s Blessing quest right now. If she could learn Templar Magic, Asskickers United would gain yet another Mage who could cast Advanced Magic. Summer Bug, Undying Scoundrel, Sunny South, Beginner Student, and Nimbus were the cream of the crop. In future guild wars, highly-skilled experts, especially Mages, would be crucial.

“We’ll need to up that number. I’ve installed some concealed defensive points on top of the walls. We must take advantage of every Advanced Magic at our disposal,” Nie Yan noted. Advanced

Magic was highly effective at repelling invaders.

With the contingency plan set in place, Nie Yan chit-chatted some more with Smoke Stub and Bladelight, while Painted Muslin, Young Seven, Yi Yan, and the others walked over.

Tang Yao was hurrying over to the guild headquarters as well.

This was a gathering of the top-ranking members of Asskickers United.

While everyone chatted about the guild's future, Nie Yan received a notification.

Faded has obtained the third chapter from Volume V of the Book of Order, Chapter of Compassion. You will be notified of the player's location once every hour.

Coordinates: Glory City, 23535.23532.36582

Casual has obtained the the sixth chapter from Volume V of the Book of Order, Chapter of Tolerance. You will be notified of the player's location once every hour.

Coordinates: Glory City, 23535.2532.36582

On top of receiving updated coordinates hourly, as a Grand Scholar, Nie Yan also possessed the ability to predict an opponent's position once every day.

Nie Yan was surprised by how quickly the chapters were being found. Over the last five days, they had changed hands multiple times, with Faded in possession of two and Casual in possession of one.

Most notably, two players were in the same location! Nie Yan's imagination ran wild. Were they trying to snatch each other's chapters? Were they working together?

Out of all the chapters of the Book of Order, the first six in the Glimpse of Darkness were the most important. The remaining chapters were slightly inferior, but they were still amazing nonetheless.

Nie Yan turned to Guo Huai and asked, "About that player I asked you to investigate the other day, Faded, what did you dig up on him?"

"He's the best Fighter in Bloodlust Blades and part of their core elite. Their group of 10 regularly hunts Elites together. I've dispatched our Hundred Thieves to ambush them with the coordinates you've provided, but they've repelled all of our attacks

so far, killing many of our members in the process. Not only is he incredibly strong, but he's also on high alert. We're being closely monitored, so our forces can't make any large movements; otherwise, we might fall into a trap," Guo Huai replied. After all, the Hundred Thieves were a core force of Asskickers United. It would be disastrous if they were wiped.

"Faded..." Nie Yan muttered to himself. He wasn't too knowledgeable about players outside of Calore in his past life. Save for some extremely famous figures, the rest were completely unfamiliar to him, so the name Faded didn't ring a bell. Back then, he would sell a large heap of gold and equipment every few days for cash. He was dirt poor. Teleporting to another city cost 1 gold at minimum. Unless it was absolutely necessary, he would never be willing to agree to such a lavish expense, so he rarely travelled to other cities.

Seeing Nie Yan racking his brain over this matter, Smoke Stub interjected. "I know a little about Faded. He's rank 30-something on the professional player leaderboards. In the past, he wasn't affiliated with any group. But recently, he joined Bloodlust Blades after they gave him an offer he couldn't refuse."

"How would you rate him?" Nie Yan asked. A large force was too eye-catching, and would easily be noticed by Bloodlust Blades. If it came down to it, he would have to make the trip down to Glory City and take action himself. He was confident the enemy had no way of holding him down.

"Pretty highly, he's a Fighter who excels at PvP," Smoke Stub replied honestly.

“Oh...? Who would win in a duel, him or Bladelight?” Nie Yan asked half-jokingly. After all, Bladelight was a top 3 Fighter in his past life. There was no way he could lose.

“Hard to say. If we’re just talking solely about who’s better at tanking, I’d give the win over to Bladelight. Faded is more of a bandit-like fellow. He wears equipment geared toward PvP. His favourite pastime is picking random fights with players in the wilderness and extorting them out of their gold and equipment. His name is almost always branded red. He’s pretty infamous in our circle,” Smoke Stub answered. He was quite familiar with the matters of the professional gaming world.

“Well, I guess it’s up to me to deal with him then,” Nie Yan concluded. Even if he failed his assassination attempt, he could simply slip away with stealth. If he wished to flee, very few people could stop him.

Besides, it was about time he tested out the might of Zennarde’s Sword!

“Be careful. Don’t let them turn the tables on you.” Smoke Stub chuckled. Even though Faded was a top-notch expert, he could only blame his own misfortune for encountering a freak like Nie Yan.

Nie Yan turned to Guo Huai and asked, “Do we have any Unknown Transfer Scrolls in the treasury?”

“Around 10 or so,” Guo Huai replied. Thanks to the hard work of the lower-ranking guild members, the treasury was well-stocked with such items.

“Get me three,” Nie Yan ordered. He would keep them with him in case of emergency.

“We initially planned on inviting you to run dungeons with us today, but it seems that’s gone up in smoke now. We’re still lacking a Thief,” Bladelight helplessly remarked. He had pretty much gathered everyone. The only person missing was Nie Yan.

“What about One Strike Vow? I don’t see why she can’t fill my spot.” Nie Yan chuckled. Any person with a discerning eye could tell the relationship between Bladelight and One Strike Vow was not shallow.

When Nie Yan presented him with such an obvious solution, a rarely-seen embarrassed smile surfaced on Bladelight’s face.

Following the activation of the transfer point which connected United City to Calore, more and more Asskickers United members arrived. All of them went up to greet Nie Yan.

“Hello, Boss!”

“Long time no see!”

Nie Yan swept his eyes over these players as one familiar face



after another entered his gaze. Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, Natural Fiend... all of them arrived

“You’re running dungeons together, right? Why don’t I see Black Heaven with you guys?” Nie Yan asked. He naturally didn’t want to see Black Heaven, someone who would become an Archbishop, being isolated from the group.

“We tried, but that kid is too damn anti-social! We’ve already tried inviting him to level with us a couple of times, but he always declines,” Undying Scoundrel gloomily replied.

“You guys are the elites of the guild! It’s important you all get along with each other.” Nie Yan solemnly said. He wasn’t joking. A guild was only as strong as the cohesiveness and unity of its members!

“We know. Back in Twilight Forest, that kid’s Templar Magic Blessing was amazing. It was like we gained several hundred more Bladelights. A Priest like that, we could hardly wait to get closer to him,” Summer Bug explained on Undying Scoundrel’s behalf.

The others also nodded in agreement. Black Heaven’s Templar Magic had left a deep impression in their minds.

These players also understood the importance of bonding with fellow guildmates. It was probably due to a personal reason that Black Heaven didn’t wish to play together with them. However, it would still be good if they could become a close-knit group. Black Heaven and Black Hell were people who kept their promises, so Nie

Yan wasn't worried about the possibility of Black Heaven leaving the guild.

Guo Huai read over a recent reconnaissance report, then turned to Nie Yan and said, "The Hundred Thieves scouted out the coordinates you just provided. They've spotted Faded!"

"Good." Nie Yan narrowed his eyes. This time, he was going to duke it out with Bloodlust Blades.

# Chapter 295 – God-Slaying Sword

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Nie Yan looked over his gear: Darkbright Chestpiece, Skywalker Set, Zennarde's Sword, and Glimpse of Darkness. When he first started out, collecting the chapters from the Book of Order, everything was still at an initial stage of development. But now, the quality of his gear far surpassed that of the vast majority of players, Zennarde's Sword in particular. He doubted any other player at present possessed a weapon with over 600 attack power, Level Ignore +12, and Ignore Armour. Not to mention his stats were already staggering. Even the tankiest of Fighters couldn't avoid being cut down by him!

Nie Yan was curious about how many players were by Faded's side. If he encountered a group of peak elites, he would have to tread carefully.

Nie Yan naturally had no plans of throwing his life away. When outnumbered as a Thief, tactics were of vital importance.

"Be careful. I just received a report that Faded has over a dozen players by his side," Guo Huai warned. But after recalling Nie Yan's past feats, he laughed it off. "I guess I'm just being a worrywart. Since when has being outnumbered ever mattered to you?"

From the perspective of Guo Huai, Smoke Stub, and the others, Nie Yan was skilled enough to breeze through any obstacle he encountered.

"Hurry back after you take care of those guys and retrieve that

chapter or whatever. We still need you to finalize the building plans of the other strongholds. Also, we need you to guide us in the new Level 40 dungeon, Dragon Bell Valley, tomorrow,” Bladelight said. With Nie Yan’s help, they could avoid a lot of unnecessary suffering and hardship.

“No problem. Just contact me when the time comes,” Nie Yan replied. This team was formed from the peak experts of the guild. Even dungeons on Specialist difficulty wouldn’t pose a challenge to them.

Apart from those several chapters from the Book of Order, Nie Yan figured it was about time to retrieve the next fragment of Sulgata’s Shadow from the Level 30 map, Karon Gorge. It was hidden in a remote location, so he wasn’t worried about it being snatched away by someone else. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have put it off for so long.

When Yu Rui of the Dragonsoar Financial Group arrived, she was given control of the real-world business district in United City. Thanks to this contribution, the Dragonsoar Financial Group upped their investment and rewarded Asskickers United with an additional 50,000 gold.

Nie Yan immediately put this gold to use by outfitting the members of Asskickers United with high-end auxiliary items such as larger bags. Furthermore, the number of players with mounts increased to 3,000, all of whom were elites nurtured by the guild with the utmost care.

After capturing the strongholds, Asskickers United ascended to

Level 5 and was steadily progressing towards Level 6.

Asskickers United rapidly expanded thanks to the financial support of the Dragonsoar Financial Group, causing more and more players in Calore to flock to them.

“I’ll be going to take a look around Glory City. All the major guilds are seizing strongholds and developing them. Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame don’t pose a threat to us for the time being. The guilds we should be watching out for are Alliance of Mages, Divine Protectors, and especially Bloodlust Blades since they’re the closest to us. We have no choice but to be on our toes,” Nie Yan reminded.

“Don’t worry. Even though we haven’t really started construction on the other strongholds yet, their walls have been reinforced and they’re guarded by plenty of our guild’s members. Even if the enemy tries to mount a sneak attack, we can hold out long enough for reinforcements to arrive!” Guo Huai assured. He had long since thought this through. Although the Glory City-based Bloodlust Blades was the closest to Calore, even if they took over one of Asskickers United’s strongholds, they lacked the resources and manpower to hold it for long. After all, Calore was Asskickers United’s territory!

Nie Yan nodded. Since Guo Huai had already accounted for such a scenario, he felt reassured.

“Bloodlust Blades have been seeking contact with Radiant Sacred Flame and Victorious Return. It seems like they want to join forces to deal with us. They’ve even tried to woo some of our players over

to their side, like Summer Bug and Natural Fiend. Even though the invitations were rejected, it's hard to say a few weren't tempted," Guo Huai added. These matters had left him swamped with work.

"I'm sure the vast majority of our players realize those offers aren't genuine, and are only meant to sow discord. By staying in Asskickers United, they'll definitely grow in the future. But if they turn-coat, no matter how skilled they are, they'll always be looked down on by others," Nie Yan said. In Conviction, if a player betrayed their guild for material gains, they would forever be labeled a traitor in everyone's minds. From then on, who could possibly trust them?

When an outstanding player joined a guild, they would generally be made to sign a contract in exchange for preferential treatment. If they wished to leave, they would be presented a hefty bill. Combine this with the fact that a bad mark would follow them after breaking an agreement, most contracted players rarely withdrew from their guilds. As for ordinary, bottom-ranking members, if they wanted to leave, nothing could stop them.

Of course, there would always be a greedy few who didn't care about reputation.

"I fear many of our players will be swayed by their offers," Guo Huai said. Recently, he had seen a slight increase in the number of players withdrawing from the guild.

"What's there to be afraid of? If they're trying to woo away our players with generous offers, why don't we do the same? In fact, we can even offer them better terms! It's not like Asskickers

United is lacking money. However, those that do jump ship have to be monitored closely. Give them the best treatment, but insert the most air-tight clauses in their contracts to prevent them from jumping ship again,” Nie Yan ordered. The competition between guilds didn’t only happen out in the open. There were also constant battles occurring in the shadows.

Asskickers United wasn’t afraid of any challenge. Although they didn’t hold the numerical advantage, each member received larger benefits, to the extent that they were several times higher than that of other guilds’. Many players wanted to join the guild but would never get the chance no matter how hard they racked their brains. So there were very few guild members who wished to leave.

It was precisely this tactic of prioritizing elites that made the members of Asskickers United stronger than the average player. This also fostered the honour of being a member of Asskickers United. Add this to the fact that the guild members were already a close-knit group, although the poaching tactics of Bloodlust Blades might produce some results, its impact would be minimal and would fail to shake the foundation of the guild.

“I’ll get right to it. I want to see just who’ll come out on top, us or Bloodlust blades!” Guo Huai said, his eyes brimming with spirit. Giving the enemy a taste of their own medicine, what a clever strategy!

With Guo Huai handling the affairs of the guild, Nie Yan felt reassured. Guo Huai was always earnest with his work. Plus, with him directing everything from the back, as long as no major

problems occurred, everything would be fine.

Bladelight and the others had formed their team. They were ready to set out.

“Be careful you guys. Don’t let yourselves be surrounded and ambushed,” Nie Yan warned. When they were out levelling in ordinary maps, they could easily become targets for the enemy. Even though recently Victorious Return and Radiant Sacred Flame had settled down quite a bit, Asskickers United still had many other enemies, including none other than Bloodlust Blades!

“You don’t need to worry about us. We’re going to train in a Level 50 map. There’s usually no players there,” Bladelight replied.

Nie Yan gazed at his guild members: Bladelight, Smoke Stub, Aloof Shadow, Painted Muslin, Undying Scoundrel, Summer Bug, Sunny South... they were the top elites of Asskickers United. If they encountered trouble, with their strength, the players from other guilds would have a hard time taking them down.

While Nie Yan chatted with them, a few of the members repeatedly glanced at his waist.

Smoke Stub finally asked on their behalf, “Some of us are wondering about that sword on your waist. It looks pretty awesome. Where did it drop?”

Zennarde’s Sword had a very distinct appearance. With its raging



black flames which were impossible to conceal, for it not to attract attention would be a miracle.

Nie Yan chuckled. Did they believe Zennarde's Sword was like Splitting Edge or the Everlasting Set, where if they grinded long enough, it would eventually drop? They couldn't be more wrong!

"This weapon is called Zennarde's Sword," Nie Yan replied with a smile. If he didn't reveal this now, these guys would probably keep pestering him about where it dropped.

At these words, everyone revealed a shocked expression.

"Zennarde? Isn't that the name of the tyrant from the Dark Era?" Smoke Stub gulped. The name of this sword gave him too great of a shock. After all, Dragon King Zennarde wasn't simply an ordinary legendary figure!

"Damn! No wonder it looks so awesome. It's Dragon King Zennarde's weapon!" Bladelight exclaimed. He was eager to find out the weapon's properties.

Zennarde's Sword! Anyone who heard this name would know it referred to a one-of-a-kind weapon!

"A Legendary weapon?" Smoke Stub asked. Items with names were usually Sub Legendary or Legendary-grade, especially one that carried the name of the undisputed tyrant, Dragon King Zennarde! It should at least be Legendary-grade. Its properties

were definitely off the charts!

“It’s a sealed Godly Legendary. Its properties are roughly on par with a Level 50 Dark Gold weapon,” Nie Yan explained. Since everyone was curious, it wasn’t necessary for him to hide the properties of Zennarde’s Sword. He directly shared its information in chat.

In an instant, the properties of Zennarde’s Sword spread among the guild members like wildfire. Seeing its properties, all of them were astounded. This was the weapon used by the boss of Asskickers United, Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame!

Even though Zennarde’s Sword was currently only as powerful as a Level 50 Dark Gold Weapon, it was still matchless at the current stage of the game! A weapon with such valiant offensive properties, no one would have any qualms about calling it a powerful tool of slaughter, a god-slaying sword!

## Chapter 296 – Shocking

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Zennarde's Sword quickly became a legend within Asskickers United, just like the Grimmar Soul Staff.

These were two pieces of unrivalled equipment!

Zennarde's Sword was nothing more than a large beatstick to Nie Yan. However, since he could raise the influence of Asskickers United by waving it around, he would. He just had to make sure no one snatched it away from him.

A picture of Zennarde's Sword was posted online. Its valiant properties immediately shocked the players on the forums.

It was a piece of equipment every player would drool over.

The description of the six seals placed on Zennarde's Sword had people's imaginations running wild. This sword was equivalent to a growth-type weapon. For every seal that was removed, its properties would increase dramatically!

A picture of Nie Yan posing with Zennarde's Sword also circulated around. He looked intense with both his dark leather armour and brooding expression illuminated under the flickering glow of the sword's black flames.

When this picture hit the forums, it spread like wildfire. Although Nie Yan couldn't be described as handsome, his icy

demeanor paired along with his breathtaking equipment made for a stunning sight.

Even though there was no caption, the players recognized Nie Yan almost immediately as the guild leader of Asskickers United, Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame!

Nie Yan was practically synonymous with Asskickers United right now. He was an unshakeable legend! Any respectable player would've at least heard of him. His appearance had long since been seared into everyone's minds after accomplishing so many spectacular feats.

There was a lively discussion ongoing below the picture.

「Holy shit! Look at his gear! And here I am still using Silver-grade trash, fuck... Orz.」

「Poster above, don't feel too bad. The player in the picture is a god!」

There were countless similar comments spanning across many pages.

Nie Yan rarely ever paid attention to the forums. Save for some posts related to the major guilds, he ignored everything else.

Nie Yan returned to Calore through the transfer point in the guild headquarters, then teleported to Glory City.

「Who's keeping an eye on Faded?」Nie Yan asked Guo Huai as he rode out of the city gates on horseback and headed for the location.

「Tyrannical, he's a member of our Hundred Thieves,」Guo Huai replied.

Tyrannical? Didn't I see him back in Sinful Gorge? He wasn't too shabby if I recall correctly... Nie Yan felt slightly reassured.

Nie Yan galloped through the rocky wastelands that surrounded Glory City. His destination was the mountain range in the distance. The scenery here was very different. While Calore's territory was full of fertile plains and grasslands, this place was bone dry like the Gobi Desert. The mountains up ahead were also barren. The only signs of flora were a handful of plants sporadically sprouting here and there.

After entering the mountains, Nie Yan unsummoned his Faulkner Warhorse and started making his way towards Tyrannical.

「Where are you?」Nie Yan contacted Tyrannical.

「Boss, you're here?」Tyrannical exclaimed in a daze. He never thought Nie Yan would personally come.「I'm at 238.289.280!」

As Nie Yan moved toward the coordinates, he soon found Tyrannical hiding behind a large boulder.

A group of 15 players were hunting Level 50 Desert Pythons up ahead. Their mobbing speed was pretty fast. The Fighters pulled aggro while the Mages in the backline bombarded the Desert Pythons with magic, clearing them quickly and efficiently.

Nie Yan glanced at Tyrannical. He looked much better off compared to the last time they met. He was Level 41, and the quality of his gear had risen greatly. For him to be able to snag himself a Level 40 Pursuer Set was quite impressive.

With Nie Yan right beside him, Tyrannical couldn't contain his excitement. Nie Yan was without question a godly existence in the eyes of every Thief. Each of his battle videos was an instant classic that everyone referred to for guidance. But so far, not a single player could mimic his ghostly movements.

Tyrannical often studied videos of Nie Yan's battles. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Nie Yan was his idol!

"What's the situation over there? How many players are there?" Nie Yan asked. His eyes narrowed like a hawk's as he observed the players in the distance.

Even though this sharp soul-piercing gaze wasn't directed at him, Tyrannical gulped down a mouthful of saliva and broke out in a cold sweat. It was precisely this type of domineering air that allowed Nie Yan to shake countless hearts.

Tyrannical took a deep breath. "They have 13 players in total: 2

Fighters, 1 Berserker, 1 Paladin, 5 Mages, 2 Priests, and 2 Thieves. All of them are highly skilled, especially that Fighter named Faded. The Arcane Mage called Casual is no pushover either. 11 of our brothers have fallen at their hands!" His voice trembled with anger and grief near the end.

Tyrannical had closely bonded with his fellow members in the Hundred Thieves. Even a slightly eccentric fellow like him found a spot among them. They regularly carried out missions together, with everyone working towards the same goal. Add to that all of them shared the honour of belonging to this exclusive force within Asskickers United, and it was no surprise they developed a strong sense of comradery among themselves. Their hearts stung when one of their companions fell.

Nie Yan understood Tyrannical's feelings. This sort of brotherly bond was forged after countless battles together. It was the deepest sentiment a person could experience in their lifetime, created from facing off against a greater foe, keeping watch over each other's backs, developing an understanding that transcended words, and the confidence to entrust their lives into the hands of their companions!

Nie Yan patted Tyrannical's shoulder. "Remember their names. Learn from these setbacks and boldly face the challenges ahead, so that you can avenge them later on!"

This was a principle Nie Yan personally adhered to. It was the moral backbone of a man!

Tyrannical nodded with a determined expression.

“Let’s take them on together,” Nie Yan suggested. He wasn’t sure how skilled the 13 players up ahead were. But for them to kill multiple members of the Hundred Thieves, they definitely couldn’t be weak.

“Yes!” Tyrannical enthusiastically exclaimed. Fighting alongside Nirvana Flame was the dream of countless players in Asskickers United.

Nirvana Flame has sent you a party invite. Will you accept?

Yes! Tyrannical hurriedly accepted.

Nie Yan received a notification.

Tyrannical has joined your party.

“Let’s go,” Nie Yan said. His body merged into the surroundings as he entered stealth. He slowly slunk toward the group of players up ahead.

Tyrannical quickly followed suit. His heart was beating with excitement as he tagged behind Nie Yan.

Gusts of wind regularly blew over from the mountainside,



blotting out the sky and carrying an ocean of sand across the rocky landscape. This type of environment was advantageous to Thieves. Nie Yan was completely untraceable within the blowing sands.

...

A Fighter clad in crimson armour charged into a crowd of Desert Pythons. He activated Taunt, instantly drawing their aggro, then hunkered behind his shield. Right then, an Arcane Mage in the backline finished a chant. With a wave of his staff, he rained down a shower of fireballs on the Desert Pythons.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」 A curtain of damage values floated up into the sky.

The Priests shielded the Fighter with a Radiant Barrier, then kept his health topped off with Heals, allowing him to brush off the damage from the fireballs.

The Desert Pythons quickly shifted aggro and pounced toward the backline. Right on cue, the Fighter roared out with a Demoralizing Shout and halted them dead in their tracks. After which a second volley of fireballs rained down from the sky and swept them all away.

When the dust and smoke settled, only the Fighter remained standing. Scattered across the ground were the corpses of over 60 Desert Pythons. Web-like cracks spread throughout his Radiant Barrier before it shattered into shards of light. The teamwork displayed just now was impressive, to say the least.

“Faded, Casual, you guys are awesome!” the group members praised in a flattering tone.

“Mhmm, it wasn’t too much trouble,” Faded replied in a haughty tone.

Faded appeared to be around 25 years old. He was a large, burly man clad in crimson armour. His name was branded a deep red, signifying he had at minimum killed 60 players. He held his single-handed sword while walking back to the group.

“It was fun,” Casual said to Faded with a smile.

Casual was an Arcane Mage. He was dressed in dark robes covered in mysterious runes which gave off a strange aura. He was about the same age as Faded. After playing together for so many years, the two of them could be considered old partners.

Casual sat on the ground drinking Spring Water to restore his mana, while the two Thieves departed to lure in the next wave of mobs.

“Say, why did those morons over at Asskickers United stop sending people over? My hands are getting itchy. I’m right here waiting for them. I’ll kill as many as they send!” Faded arrogantly exclaimed.

They knew the Chapter of Peace was in Nirvana Flame’s hands.

However, his recent locations had been quite odd, so they had no way of predicting where he was going to be. Over these last few days, they had suffered repeated ambushes from Asskickers United. However, they successfully repelled the enemy every time, killing over 10 from the Hundred Thieves in the process.

“Don’t let your guard down. That Nirvana Flame guy is pretty strong,” Casual warned, though his tone didn’t contain a hint of seriousness.

“That coward? He’s a turtle hiding in his shell. All he dares to do is send people after us. Do you really think he has the guts to come over himself?” Faded sneered.

## Chapter 297 – Powerful Foe

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“With the guild leader closely monitoring the situation, Asskickers United won’t dare to send a large force after us. So long as we’re not outnumbered more than 10 to 1, they’re pretty much easy pickings, like those garbage Thieves from before. We just don’t know if Nirvana Flame will show up,” Casual lazily said as he sipped his Spring Water.

“So that’s what the boss’s intentions were! It’s best if that fool believes he can take us on all by himself!” Faded exclaimed with an arrogant smile as he picked up the loot off the ground.

Their group consisted of the top elites in Bloodlust Blades. With an average level of 44, they were geared with some of the best equipment currently available. More importantly, all of them were scouted out for their talents in PvP!

Based on his analysis of the enemy’s personality, Bloodlust Mad Blade believed Nie Yan would definitely take the bait and come after the chapters from the Book of Order. Nie Yan was a lone wolf, so all Bloodlust Mad Blade had to do was present him with a seemingly beatable situation, like a group of 13 farming away.

These 13 players were incredibly skilled at PvP. Each of them could easily take on five or six ordinary experts with ease.

Even Bloodlust Mad Blade had no choice but to acknowledge Nie Yan’s skill. If they fought, it was hard to say who would come out on top. However, Nie Yan was just a single person. There was a

limit to how heaven-defying he could be!

Nie Yan gazed beside him. Tyrannical was clenching his dagger while his other hand was balled up into a fist and trembling.

「Tyrannical, what's the matter?」Nie Yan whispered through voice chat.

「That bastard! Even though we lost, my brothers in the Hundred Thieves aren't trash! Fucking asshole, I'm going to make him swallow those words!」Tyrannical's eyes were bloodshot like those of an enraged beast.

Tyrannical couldn't care less if others insulted him, but Casual's snide remark had struck a raw nerve! Although his fallen brothers ultimately failed in their task, their sacrifice should be worthy of respect. It wasn't something to be dishonoured!

A staunch man would never yield to adversity! Father Nie had once passed these words down to him, and Nie Yan always kept them in his mind. He looked at Tyrannical with a hint of admiration.

「Boss.」Tyrannical gazed at Nie Yan with a determined expression.

「What is it? Speak,」Nie Yan said. He already had an idea of what Tyrannical wanted to say.

「Leave Casual to me. I'll show him just who's the real trash!」  
Tyrannical proclaimed in a firm tone.

Nie Yan thought for a moment before nodding in agreement.  
「Alright, I won't touch him. It'll be up to you.」

「Mhm! I'll definitely avenge my brothers!」Tyrannical gritted his teeth as he gazed at Casual in the distance. His eyes flashed with killing intent.

Tyrannical was clearly no match for Casual. But since he was this determined, there was no harm in letting him give it a shot. It might prove to be a learning experience for him. On top of that, so long as he didn't waver, he would definitely retrieve the honour of his comrades in time!

Nie Yan started making his plans. With Tyrannical acting as a distraction, he could take advantage of the confusion to assassinate Faded!

Over on Faded's side, the two Thieves came back with a group of Desert Pythons in tow. Their group continued clearing mobs.

Nie Yan could determine these players weren't simple from the smooth and leisurely way in which they dealt with the Desert Pythons. To assemble such a lineup, the intentions of Bloodlust Blades were as clear as day!

They were waiting for Nie Yan!

It was no big loss to Bloodlust Blades if these players died. But if Nie Yan died, it would be a big blow to Asskickers United.

However, Nie Yan had Unknown Transfer Scrolls in his bag. So if he encountered any real danger, he could immediately escape.

Nie Yan gave Tyrannical the signal, then began creeping his way towards Faded.

...

Faded charged into a Desert Python, then knocked it back several feet with a Heroic Strike.

“Faded, the guild leader said we’re going to run Dragon Bell Valley in an hour!” a nearby Paladin said, then cut down a Desert Python with Divine Strike.

“Alright.” Faded nodded.

In this instant the Paladin suddenly felt an uneasy premonition. His gaze blossomed with divine light as he locked onto a boulder in the distance, whereupon he saw a shadow dart by.

“There’s a Thief over there!” As soon as the Paladin spoke, a Priest threw an orb of light into the sky, illuminating the ground below and revealing the shadowy silhouette of a player.

Faded's group caught a glimpse of Tyrannical's retreating figure as he bolted away.

"It's that idiot again. Is he suicidal?" the Paladin sneered as he gave chase with the others in tow. They were clearly experts with excellent awareness. Even when in pursuit, they didn't break formation, always maintaining a distance no more than six meters apart.

They understood that the enemy wasn't alone. It was highly probable there were others.

Indomitable Will! The Paladin's speed sharply increased as he quickly closed the distance.

Meanwhile, Nie Yan's cold gaze was locked onto Faded. He went into pursuit after activating stealth.

While chasing Tyrannical with his teammates, Faded suddenly felt a cold chill at the back of his neck.

So fast! Faded inwardly cried out in alarm. He quickly buffed himself with War God's Protection as his body became enshrouded with a faint golden radiance, making him resemble a golden armoured celestial god.

Smothering Strike! Nie Yan's dagger struck the back of Faded's head like a lightning bolt.



Just as Nie Yan was about to follow up with another attack, he was surprised to discover Faded wasn't stunned.

Shit! It's War God's Protection!

"Whirlwind Slash!" Faded spun his sword around like a top with sword energy streaming out in every direction.

Nie Yan hurriedly pulled back and activated the Blackbright Barrier, then raised his dagger to parry.「Klang!」He negated some of the damage, but the attack still chunked him for over 100 health.

When Faded saw Nie Yan's appearance, his lips curved into an arrogant smile.

"You're finally here, Mad Rogue! You've kept me waiting for far too long!" Faded charged forward and slashed down at Nie Yan.

「Boom!」The sword erupted out in flames as a four-meter-long tongue of fire chopped down from the sky.

It was the Advanced Skill, Blazing Cleaver!

Faded really was a bit too eager, bringing out such a powerful skill almost right off the bat!

Even though Faded appeared calm on the surface, his heart was

pounding like a jackhammer against his chest. The opponent in front of him wasn't an average player, but rather the famous Mad Rogue! It would be a miracle if he didn't feel the slightest pressure. Beyond this, he felt a fever-pitch excitement. If he cut down Nie Yan, his name would become known throughout the entire game!

In the instant the scorching heat blasted his face, Nie Yan revealed a sneer. Shadow Waltz! His body turned into a blur as he vanished into thin air.「Boom!」The Blazing Cleaver crashed into the ground, sending flames flying everywhere.

Nie Yan reappeared behind Faded and unleashed a flurry of attacks with Zennarde's Sword.

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Faded's health was immediately cut down by half.

Crap! Faded broke out in a cold sweat. He never expected his health to drop so quickly.

Flaming Upheaval!

Faded plunged his sword into the ground as web-like cracks spread out on the surface and erupted with flames. He resembled a

flame god as he stood at the epicenter of the terrifying inferno, radiating an awe-inspiring might.

One of the Priests pursuing Tyrannical noticed Faded being ambushed at the back. He quickly cast Heal, then gave him a Radiant Barrier.

The Priest's reaction was incredibly quick!

Soon after, the Mages also noticed the commotion and sent fireballs and ice bullets flying in Nie Yan's direction.

Seeing as he lost his opportunity, Nie Yan activated Gale Step and charged out of the inferno created by Flaming Upheaval. By the time the rest of Faded's companions rushed over to surround him, he had already disappeared from sight.

"Was that Mad Rogue Nirvana Flame?" the Berserker asked. He swept his gaze over the surroundings but couldn't find a trace of the opponent!

"Yea..." Faded nodded with an ashen face. He had been too careless just now, and it nearly cost him his life! He didn't dare to imagine the consequences if he hadn't activated Flaming Upheaval in time.

"Your fight was too quick. It was already over by the time we turned our heads. How skilled is the Mad Rogue?"

“Just so-so!” Faded replied with a grunt, having somewhat calmed down by now. Just a moment ago, he had allowed his thirst for fame to cloud his judgement. Those attacks were simply too fierce! He was a tanky Fighter, yet Nie Yan had taken him down to half-health almost in an instant. The high damage coupled with the additional bleed and burn effects were enough to make his blood run cold. He had to admit he was no match for Nie Yan in a duel, but he had many strong companions by his side! He refused to believe Nie Yan could be so heaven-defying in this sort of circumstance! The scene of Nie Yan killing the guild leader of Unhindered, Hei Zhuo, in Kiln Fire Woods had no effect on them!

“Everyone, pay attention. Don’t be careless!” warned the Holy Mage in the group. He appeared to be in his thirties. His face was calm when he spoke, yet his words inspired respect and authority.

Faded opened his mouth to speak, but then swallowed his words back down. This Holy Mage was the only person in the group he thoroughly conceded to. He was the second most skilled player in Bloodlust Blades. He was normally quite low-key and rarely ever spoke. He didn’t hold any position of power in the guild either. But in terms of raw skill, even Bloodlust Mad Blade had to show him respect.

Holy Mage, Maple Blazeheart! He was a fellow with two Advanced Magics, and was one of the supporting pillars of Bloodlust Blades!

Maple Blazeheart had witnessed the battle between Faded and Nie Yan a moment ago in its entirety. If it wasn’t for the timely support from the Priest, Faded would’ve long become an ice-cold

corpse on the ground. It was actually absurd how this fool didn't realize just how close he was to death, still believing it was his Flaming Upheaval that scared the opponent off.

At this moment, Maple Blazeheart looked at his chat and announced in a heavy tone, "Withered found him!"

## Chapter 298 – Gale Ambush

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Nie Yan was simply testing the waters a moment ago, which was why he only used his most basic skills. In fact, he could have bursted Faded down to zero health during the invincibility period of Gale Step. However, that would've left him open to the retaliation from the surrounding Mages. Even he didn't dare to take a bombardment from them head-on, so he opted for a strategic retreat.

Nie Yan had a cautious nature. Whenever he encountered an expert, he would first gain a feel for their skill. He would then attempt to bait out as many of their trump cards as possible to minimize the possibility of them surprising him when he fought them for real.

A Thief who was quick to reveal their cards probably wasn't an expert. Advanced Skills easily had cooldown timers of up to a week or longer. If a player wasted one, they would be without it for the next several days. If they encountered a truly life-threatening situation during this period, what awaited them would most likely be an extremely tragic end.

Every powerful skill was pivotal and not to be used lightly. Save trump cards for extraordinary circumstances: this was one of the lessons Nie Yan had learned from his 10 years in Conviction.

After his first exchange with this group of players, Nie Yan could tell that none of them were amateurs from how quickly they came to Faded's rescue. Each of them was a seasoned expert in PvP!

Even though Nie Yan was ahead of these players by years in terms of game experience, he didn't dare to underestimate them. He would have no problem fighting such players one on one, but there were 13 of them!

With how the skills of the various members mixed and matched with each other, the combat strength they could display wasn't simple addition!

Nie Yan received a message from Tyrannical at this moment. He had gotten away from the players pursuing him. He was currently on standby in the area, searching for another opportunity to attack.

Just as Nie Yan was preparing to launch another ambush, he felt a cold chill at the back of his neck.

A Thief!

Nie Yan's high Awareness allowed him to instantly lock onto the opponent's position. While the pommel of a dagger was smashing towards the back of his head, his figure blurred into motion like a ghostly shadow. He raised his dagger and parried the opponent's attack.

Nie Yan never expected to be seen through stealth. He quickly followed up by striking towards the Thief's forehead with a Concussive Blow.

When the Thief was knocked out of stealth, Nie Yan was shocked to see their appearance. No wonder they discovered him!

The Thief's pupils were rhombus-shaped and emitted a dark blue glow, resembling a dazzling gemstone. This was Sapphire Gaze, a special skill that allowed the player to see through stealth!

Just how long has he been watching me? His teammates are probably arriving soon! Nie Yan never expected to encounter such a mishap. Even the most experienced expert could still make mistakes!

The Thief panicked and raised his dagger in an attempt to parry Nie Yan's attack.

At this time, four figures appeared on top of a slope. They were Faded, Maple Blazeheart, and the others!

Nie Yan took advantage of this opportunity to retreat. He activated Disappear and vanished from sight.

The Thief used Sapphire Gaze to scan for traces of Nie Yan, but he was nowhere to be found!

Disappear couldn't be seen through in the initial seconds after activation!

「I can't see him anymore!」the Thief informed through voice chat. Even Sapphire Gaze couldn't locate Nie Yan! Just what kind



of skill did the Mad Rogue use?

At this moment, the Thief discovered a silhouette almost 20 meters away. Sapphire Gaze was finally working! Nie Yan was incredibly fast. He had already made so much distance in such a short amount of time.

「He's over there!」The Thief pointed in Nie Yan's direction.

A glowing ball of light flew up into the sky, illuminating the ground below, and revealed a shadow dashing away.

Maple Blazeheart waved his staff as a beam of light descended from the sky.

Nie Yan quickly tumbled away. Several spells from the other Mages were flying his way, too.

「Bang!」A Holy Smite struck Nie Yan head-on, shaving away over 100 health. His Blackbright Barrier shuddered under the impact and grew dimmer.

Maple Blazeheart kept firing one spell after another at Nie Yan. His cast speed was frighteningly fast, and his timing was extremely precise, aiming every attack at the end of Nie Yan's rolls. There was no way to guard against it!

The Warriors and Paladins quickly moved in to surround Nie Yan. They evidently came prepared, how else could they already be

in position to intercept him?

Nie Yan quickly dodged to the side, avoiding the shower of spells flying at him from behind. However, he still couldn't avoid all of them.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」

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A nearby Priest waved his staff and tagged Nie Yan with a Glimmer Mark, causing a small glowing cursor to appear above his head. It revealed his exact position for some time.

The two Fighters, Berserker, and Paladin converged on Nie Yan, blocking off all paths of escape.

Charge!

Charge!

“Nirvana Flame, forfeit over your dog life!” Faded shouted with a sinister smile. He chopped down at Nie Yan with a Flame Slash, while the Paladin charged forward with a Divine Strike.

In this seemingly perilous situation, Nie Yan's lips pursed into a sneer. Do you really think this is enough to kill me? Quit

dreaming!

Demoralizing Shout!

Faded and another Warrior opened their mouths as a deep roar surged out from their throats like a great tide.

Nie Yan activated Mind Immune just as the powerful sound penetrated his eardrums.

Miss!

Faded and the other Warrior were stunned. Why did Demoralizing Shout have no effect?

Nie Yan took advantage of their momentary stupor to down an Intermediate Health Potion. With a side step, he avoided their attacks and dashed past them.

Faded swung his shield to the side in an attempt to stop Nie Yan, but he was a step too late.

Nie Yan activated Swift Retreat, crushed a Haste Scroll, and simultaneously performed the Dance of Death while dashing away.

「Bang! Bang! Bang!」Several spells struck his retreating figure, causing his Blackbright Barrier to finally shatter into tiny shards before disappearing into the air.

Nie Yan endured the damage as he melted into the surroundings. Faded and the others immediately gave chase by following the Glimmer Mark. However, he kept getting farther and farther away before eventually going out of range.

Faded, Maple Blazeheart, and the others gave up after realizing it was impossible to catch up to Nie Yan, and looked on with sullen expressions at his retreating silhouette.

“Dammit, he’s too fast!” Faded cursed. They were no match for Nie Yan’s speed. The only reason they could corner him just now was purely that their Thief spotted him with Sapphire Gaze, giving them ample time to prepare in advance.

“He’ll be back!” Maple Blazeheart declared. From start to finish, Nie Yan had never used any Advanced Skills. With such great gear, his dazzling fame as the Mad Rogue, and not to mention his status as the guild leader of Asskickers United, it would be foolish to believe he wasn’t in possession of any. The only conclusion he could reach was that Nie Yan had still only been testing them this whole time.

Faded, Maple Blazeheart, and the others tried searching around for Nie Yan. But he had already disappeared into the vast rocky wasteland.

Even after five minutes, they still found no trace of him.

“Mad Rogue, you’re sure quick to turn tail! If you have the guts,

come out and fight like a man!” Faded yelled into the surroundings, his voice travelling quite a distance.

A hot-headed fellow might really be baited out by Faded’s insults.

Nie Yan was hidden within the blowing sands. After such a long time, the Glimmer Mark had already disappeared. He snickered when he heard Faded’s shouting. Dumbass! Although he was never one to back down from a challenge, he wasn’t an idiot who would get lured out by such petty insults either.

「Boss, I failed to draw out those two Priests. They regroup too quickly, and that Paladin keeps stopping me,」Tyrannical reported. It had originally been decided that he would lure away some of their players, particularly their Priests, allowing Nie Yan to mount another ambush. However, Faded’s group was on high-alert.

「No problem,」Nie Yan replied. He understood that dealing with such a group of players wouldn’t be easy.

While Faded and the others waited for Nie Yan to reveal himself again, they began hunting a few of the monsters in the surroundings. However, they didn’t dare to aggro too many at once.

Nie Yan and Tyrannical were lurking nearby, searching for the perfect opportunity to attack. Just at this moment, the Arcane Mage Casual ran out of mana and sat down to recover. The 13 players were split into 3 groups not too far from each other.

「Tyrannical, I want you to prepare to launch an ambush on Casual.」

「Okay!」

After a while, Tyrannical got into position while in stealth.

Nie Yan gazed at Faded in the distance who still hadn't stopped shouting at the air. He wouldn't be so lucky in this next exchange.

With Flaming Upheaval on cooldown, let's see what other skills you've got!

Nie Yan made a mental note of the positions of the players in the surroundings. He revealed a cold smile as he tightly gripped his dagger. There were 13 enemies in total, not one more, not one less! It was about time to end this battle. What was about to happen next was a festival of death, a feast of slaughter!

Gale Ambush!

Nie Yan eyed Faded like prey as he started accelerating towards him. Gale Ambush increased his movement speed by an additional 200%. He was like a cheetah on the hunt, leaving after-images behind him as he dashed forward.

“Shit, it's the Mad Rogue! He's here again!” a Paladin noticed Nie Yan rushing out.

“You finally decided to show yourself again. I’ve been waiting!”  
Faded arrogantly exclaimed.

Charge!

Indomitable Will!

The Warriors and Paladins drew their swords and rushed forward to surround Nie Yan, while Maple Blazeheart, Casual, and the other Mages fired one spell after another.

“Kill!”

# Chapter 299 – The Might of Shadow Slaughter

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In the face of near imminent death, Nie Yan activated God's Blessing from the Chapter of Peace, after which a barrier of light enshrouded him.「Bang! Bang! Bang!」The shower of spells rained down on him mercilessly as crackles of light ricocheted off him like a dazzling display of fireworks. Even so, he dashed out of this shelling completely unscathed.

God's Blessing granted immunity to all magic!

Faded and his group were left absolutely gobsmacked. Perhaps Nie Yan was the only Thief bold enough to charge head-first into a hail of spells.

Did Nie Yan plan on slaughtering all 13 of them by himself!?

“Shit! It's magic immunity! Everyone, use physical attacks!” Faded welcomed Nie Yan's assault head-on. A deep grunt escaped his mouth as he swept forward with his heavy shield.

Nie Yan's figure blurred as he employed Shadow Dance to slip past the attack.

While in the middle of Gale Ambush, Nie Yan was almost too fast for the naked eye to follow.



The Shield Bash struck air as Nie Yan's figure vanished like a phantom before Faded's eyes, causing his heart to tighten. He swung around in a panic, just in time to see Zennarde's Sword stabbing towards his head at lightning speed.

Faded quickly raised his shield to block.

「Klang!」

Faded slightly recoiled under the impact, then retaliated with a Heroic Strike.

Maple Blazeheart waved his staff. A three meter tall Light Giant wielding a claymore materialized out of thin air and charged toward Nie Yan's location.

At this time, the Paladin, Berserker, and Fighter came to Faded's rescue. They charged at Nie Yan with their swords raised, wanting to chop him into mincemeat.

Nie Yan sidestepped the Heroic Strike, then activated Shadow Slaughter in combination with Apocalyptic Extinction and slashed down on Faded with Zennarde's Sword.

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A string of damage values floated up from Faded's head while the surrounding five players also received over a hundred damage each.

Even though Nie Yan was at a far lower level than these players, the Ignore Level +12 property on Zennarde's Sword allowed him to bridge the gap. So the damage he dealt was still quite fierce.

The surrounding players were all scared out of their wits. They had clearly seen Nie Yan only attack Faded, yet why did they receive damage too!?

The Priest cast Heal on Faded, followed by a Radiant Barrier.

Faded attempted to retaliate by swinging his sword, only to discover his movements had turned sluggish. He glanced at his status and noticed a Cripple Curse! It was during this brief delay that Nie Yan struck him in the forehead with Concussive Blow.

Truthfully, Faded's exchange with Nie Yan had lasted no more than a brief moment. However, he had already been incapacitated before the Warriors and Paladin could even arrive to reinforce him.

Nie Yan's dagger slashed down once more. A string of damage values floated up above Faded's head as his Radiant Barrier shattered with a loud bang. Streams of light continuously fell over him and restored his health.

Nie Yan's burst reached upwards of over a thousand damage. He unloaded all sorts of hard-hitting skills on Faded like Blast and Vital Strike.

Before Faded's companions could even get close, they had already lost two-thirds of their health to Shadow Slaughter!

What a terrifying skill! It could deal splash damage to surrounding enemies!

"Fuck! What kind of overpowered skill is this!?" the Paladin cursed. This was his first time encountering an area-of-effect Thief skill. He quickly cast a Heal on himself, then leapt into the air and chopped down at Nie Yan with his sword.

Severing Light!

Faded's health bar fluctuated up and down, but he was still relatively safe thanks to the continuous healing from the Priests. However, the same couldn't be said about his nearby companions who were almost dead. Each of them drank an Intermediate Potion and restored some of their health.

Nie Yan circled behind Faded, placing him right in front of the Paladin's Severing Light, and struck him in the back of the head with Smothering Strike.

Seeing this, the Paladin quickly withdrew his attack.

“My god! Everybody, kill him! Quick!” The Berserker charged forward. He resembled a human tank with his heavy plate armour.

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The five players quickly dropped below half health. Nie Yan's attacks were simply too fierce, to say nothing of the fact that Zennarde's Sword ignored all armour. They were hemorrhaging health too quickly!

The two Thieves pinceried Nie Yan from behind, their daggers stabbing toward his back with Smothering Strike.

Nie Yan's dagger suddenly appeared around Faded's throat.

Cutthroat!

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It was a critical hit for three times damage, an instant kill!

Despite being constantly topped off by the healing of the Priests, Faded was still one-shot by Nie Yan!

A smile formed on Nie Yan's face. This was precisely what he had been aiming for!

He had a certain probability of landing a critical hit. As long as he kept attacking, it would eventually come!

At the same time, both of the Thieves received almost 500 damage from Shadow Slaughter and collapsed dead on the ground.

Even the 30% splash damage from a critical hit was extremely terrifying!

Nie Yan had killed three people with a single attack!

Of the six melee-class players, only three remained.

The Priests in the distance were in shock. Faded was clearly at full health just now! How did he suddenly die?

Shadow Slaughter also left the nearby two Warriors and Paladin as well as the Light Giant at critical health.

The Paladin quickly cast a Heal on himself, while the two Priests healed the Berserker and Fighter.

Nie Yan hacked down at the Light Giant with Zennarde's Sword, landing a critical hit for two times damage and killing it. It dissolved into motes of light before disappearing into the air.

Seeing the Paladin buffed by Indomitable Will chopping down at him, Nie Yan took the hit head-on without the slightest bit of fear, then retaliated with a heavy slash from Zennarde's Sword.

The Paladin's health fell to zero and he collapsed to the ground.

Previously, the Paladin had restored his health back to over 600 with Heal. However, this was nothing to Nie Yan.

After finishing off the Paladin, Nie Yan was knocked flying by a Charge.

In the end, it was impossible for a single person to cope with the attacks of so many players. Nie Yan regained his footing with a flip. Seeing the Berserker charging over again, Nie Yan employed Shadow Dance to slip past him.

"Shit!" the Berserker cursed after glancing at the corpse of his Paladin companion. He quickly gave himself several buffs. His muscles bulged out violently, making him resemble an enraged grizzly.

Strength of the Bear!

“Die!” The Berserker charged at Nie Yan.

The other side clearly didn't possess as many Advanced Skills as Nie Yan. After seeing the Berserker activate Strength of the Bear, Nie Yan coldly snorted. He readied his stance and prepared to face off against the opponent.

The Mages in the distance were the most depressed. They were basically the popcorn gallery. Outside of Maple Blazeheart summoning the Light Giant, which ended up dying without doing anything useful anyway, the rest of them were completely powerless! Nie Yan's magic immunity skill nullified all their damage. They could only wonder where he obtained a piece of equipment with such an overpowered ability.

The Mages gazed on helplessly as their companions were slaughtered by Nie Yan with his unrivalled momentum.

Only around half a minute had passed since the start of the battle. Yet during this time, Nie Yan had taken out Faded, the two Thieves, and the Paladin. Everything had happened too quickly. There was no time to process these events.

While God's Blessing was still active, none of their spells had any effect on Nie Yan.

Nie Yan glanced at the remaining Fighter and Berserker. Both of them were at around half health, but they would quickly be healed back up to full.

Nie Yan turned around and dashed toward the casters.

He had only dealt with the melee-class players first because they were all relatively close together, allowing Shadow Slaughter to display the greatest effect. As for the Mages, God's Blessing was more than enough to render them useless.

After killing four of them, the remaining melee-class players wouldn't be able to make any great waves.

With the 200% movement speed bonus from Gale Ambush, Nie Yan quickly reached the two Priests, causing them to scatter like rats.

Casual waved his staff, sending an Arcane Bolt flying Nie Yan's way in an attempt to stop his assault. But just at this moment, a shadow pounced at him from behind, a dagger stabbing towards the back of his head.

Casual was nearly caught off-guard. He quickly protected himself in the nick of time as a black barrier enshrouded him.

The player ambushing him was Tyrannical!

Just as Tyrannical's Smothering Strike was about to land, Casual activated Blink and reappeared about 4 meters away, causing Tyrannical's attack to miss.

Casual turned around to look at his assailant and saw a familiar



face. He coldly laughed. “And here I was wondering who it was. You actually dared to show yourself again, trash!”

Casual condensed an Arcane Fireball in his palm, then shot it at Tyrannical.

Tyrannical rolled out of the way to avoid the Arcane Fireball. After regaining his footing, he pounced toward Casual once more.

Tyrannical was like a feral beast. He gave Casual a fierce look, expressing that he would never stop until his opponent was dead. He was a wolf stalking his prey, waiting for the perfect opportunity to go in for the kill!

Seeing Tyrannical’s expression, Casual felt his blood run cold. His gaze turned somewhat grim. With a wave of his staff, he waylaid Tyrannical’s assault with a Repel.

Tyrannical’s ambush had attracted the attention of three people. On the other side of the battlefield, Nie Yan had already arrived beside a Priest. With a slash of Zennarde’s Sword, he cut down the opponent instantly.

The Priest’s cloth armour was easily cut through by Zennarde’s Sword.

# Chapter 300 – Chapter of Compassion

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Nothing could match up to the sharpness of Zennarde's Sword!

It was an amazing weapon even at Level 60, let alone right now.

Although the Priest had cast a shield on himself beforehand, he was still killed just like that. The surrounding players felt a sense of dread fall over them.

Within the span of a minute, Nie Yan had turned the tables on them and shattered their morale!

Nie Yan was a reaper from hell, pouncing towards the remaining Priest who turned to flee. But the Priest was no match for his speed while Gale Ambush was active. He caught up and cut down the opponent in an instant!

It was like pigs to the slaughter!

With his unrivalled speed and supreme attack power, Nie Yan was a god-like existence.

While the casters scattered, the Berserker and Fighter charged toward Nie Yan in an attempt to intercept him. However, Nie Yan slipped past them with a simple sidestep.

Nie Yan dashed toward Maple Blazeheart and chopped down with

Zennarde's Sword, shaving away more than half his health. Just as Nie Yan was about to follow up with another attack, Maple Blazeheart's body became illusory while the space around him twisted and warped, whereupon he vanished without a trace.

It was Illusion Blink!

Nie Yan looked in the distance. There, he spotted Maple Blazeheart 50 meters away.

When their gazes met, Maple Blazeheart gave Nie Yan a calm smile, as though this battle had nothing to do with him, before disappearing again. Who knew if he used some kind of skill, Invisibility Potion, or something else altogether.

Under these circumstances, Maple Blazeheart knew he was no match for Nie Yan, so he withdrew.

After all, magic immunity was quite rare, and it was generally found in Advanced Skills with cooldowns of two or three days. After waiting out the duration, Nie Yan's combat ability would drop dramatically.

In fact, it wasn't simply the magic immunity. Nie Yan's Gale Ambush, Shadow Slaughter, and God's Blessing were all Advanced Skills. Upon activation, they would make the user explode with power. But after their duration ran out, they posed far less of a threat.

However, right now, Nie Yan who still had all these skills active was practically invincible. He could run down the enemy as he pleased.

While wielding Zennarde's Sword, Nie Yan was a supreme avatar of death, capable of slaughtering gods and slaying devils!

The remaining Fighter bent down to pick up the two chapters from the Book of Order that Faded had dropped. Just as he stood back up, Nie Yan had emerged behind him and attacked with a Backstab followed by a Vital Strike, killing him.

The two chapters dropped back to the ground. Hmph... Don't touch what doesn't belong to you!

Nie Yan turned his gaze to the nearby Berserker. Seeing Nie Yan's gaze lock onto him, the Berserker nearly wet his pants in fear. He made use of the speed bonus from Strength of the Bear to flee for his life. What fool would want to fight Nie Yan in his current state? It was practically suicidal!

They really couldn't figure it out. Just where did Nie Yan find so many amazing skills?

In the blink of an eye, 7 out of 13 players had fallen to Nie Yan's blade.

Over on the other side of the battlefield, Tyrannical stuck to Casual like a wad of gum. Casual had taken him down to low

health several times, but he would just escape through stealth to recover before reengaging. It appeared Tyrannical wouldn't give up until either one of them died.

It was only after Casual used all his skills that he turned to flee. However, Tyrannical stuck to him like a bone-borrowing maggot, pursuing him from behind.

“Shit!” Casual cursed after seeing the names of his fellow party members go dim one after another. He could no longer keep true to his namesake. As he looked up ahead, he was terrified to see Nie Yan blocking his path.

In that brief moment of distraction, Casual felt a cold chill at the back of his neck. Tyrannical launched his attack at this time.

“Dammit!” Casual was about to swing around to meet the opponent head-on. Just as he was midway through his chant, he was struck in the back of the head by Tyrannical with a Smothering Strike.

The dagger was fast and ruthless. Casual had no way of dodging it.

Tyrannical unleashed a chain of regular attacks, then circled to Casual's front and struck him in the forehead with Concussive Blow, stunning Casual who was about to reawaken from the attacks. He finished things off with Eviscerate followed by Lacerate, causing Casual to collapse on the ground.

Before Casual died, he heard a word whispered into his ear, “Trash!”

Tyrannical had vented out all his anger. The battle just now was an emotional rollercoaster, causing a strong desire to surface in his heart. He had to get stronger! Otherwise, he would forever be stepped on by others!

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Red River Stronghold.

This stronghold stood tall in the Red River Valley, an easily guarded location. It was the guild headquarters of Bloodlust Blades, as well as the most flourishing stronghold in Glory City’s territory. Players were flooding in from all over. It was a gold rush for merchants.

Bloodlust Blades had long since relocated from Glory City to here.

A magnificent building stood at the center of the Red River Stronghold. The large meeting hall inside was filled with all sorts of lavish decorations.

The battle between the five major guilds in Calore was still going strong, and the main benefactors from this conflict were Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors. These three guilds developed rapidly, leaving the guilds in Calore racing to

catch up. However, what worried them was the possibility of Calore becoming united. Such a scenario would pose an immense threat to them, because Calore's population was the largest out of any city in the Viridian Empire. If the guilds there were allowed to grow unimpeded, it would be hard to imagine what heights they would reach.

Bloodlust Blades, Alliance of Mages, and Divine Protectors were all closely paying attention to the situation over in Calore.

Bloodlust Mad Blade, who was clad in dark golden armour, was seated in a large hall watching a video. He had the appearance of a man in his 40s. He had a large build, and his expression was solemn. Furthermore, the armour he wore made him appear quite imposing.

"Boss, Maple Blazeheart and the rest have retreated. Nirvana Flame is too strong," a player who was watching the video beside Bloodlust Mad Blade informed. What they saw in the video was truly shocking. A single Thief had come out on top against 13 of Bloodlust Blade's elites. They could've never imagined such an outcome, even in their dreams.

When the player glanced beside him, he discovered Bloodlust Mad Blade was surprisingly calm, as if what he had just seen didn't matter.

"Instruct Old Eight and his men to take what they need from the war stockpiles and engage Nirvana Flame! He's red named. There's no way he can escape! Take note of whether he has items like Unknown Transfer Scrolls. Also, pay attention to the movements

of Asskickers United. If there's anything strange, report it immediately!" Bloodlust Mad Blade said in a heavy tone. He bursted with killing intent as he gazed at the image of Nie Yan in the video.

Nie Yan was definitely a person who could pose a threat to Bloodlust Blades. Such a calamity in the making couldn't be allowed to grow!

As soon as Bloodlust Mad Blade gave the order, the guild took action. Over 3,000 players were dispatched to Nie Yan's location. Their goal was to surround and kill him!

Nie Yan and Tyrannical had killed eight people. The other five had already escaped.

Because of Nie Yan's repeated reminders, Tyrannical didn't touch the chapter Casual dropped on the ground.

They had to leave quickly. Since this place was the territory of Bloodlust Blades, they couldn't act too unbridled. Nie Yan picked up the chapter. Combined with the two chapters he picked up from Faded earlier, he now owned the Chapter of Peace, Chapter of Tolerance, Chapter of Knowledge, and Chapter of Compassion. He also picked up several pieces of equipment, including all of Faded's equipment.

"You should take these two pieces of Thief equipment," Nie Yan said. Their properties were pretty decent. Although Tyrannical's skill didn't reach the peak, his talents weren't bad. It was



absolutely worth nurturing him. He might even grow to become a top player that could contend with the best.

Nie Yan planned to place the remaining equipment into the guild treasury.

Nie Yan looked at the properties of the four chapters from the Book of Order. Only the Chapter of Peace and Chapter of Compassion were useful for Thieves. The other two were meant for other classes.

### -Chapter of Compassion

Description: The third chapter of Volume V of the Book of Order. A fragment of a Legendary item. Whoever shall possess this chapter will receive the inheritance of the God of Light. Your mission is to spread the glory of light!

Properties: Chance to nullify an incoming spell of the Darkness-type. Receive 5 additional health every level up. Strength +30, Resilience +20, Physique +30, Movement Speed +20.

God's Grace: Increase health by 60%, Magic Resistance +30, Immune to Piercing Damage, Rank 6 Radiant Barrier. Duration: 60 seconds. Cooldown: 2 days (2/2)

Restrictions: Can only be bound by a member of the

## Righteous Guardian of Order.

Note: Item effects are applied immediately upon entering the player's bag.

Nie Yan looked over the properties of the Chapter of Compassion. This chapter was extremely useful, increasing the player's survivability. The Rank 6 Radiant Barrier was also quite useful, reducing all damage by 60% with a damage absorption shield of 1,500.

The chapters from the Book of Order were originally set items. The more chapters a player gathered, the more likely some hidden effects would be revealed.

There was no harm in collecting more chapters from the Book of Order. The more chapters Nie Yan owned, the greater the stat bonuses, and carrying the chapters would improve his character's growth.

Nie Yan scanned the surroundings. Aside from a few corpses, there was nothing else left.

"Let's go back. It's too dangerous to stay here," Nie Yan said to Tyrannical. Tyrannical didn't have a red name, so he could teleport back. As for Nie Yan, he could go back regardless, and no restrictions would be imposed on him.

“Yea!” Tyrannical nodded. He gazed in the distance. The corpses were still laying there.

Nie Yan and Tyrannical walked to a quiet area. The two activated Return Scrolls. The scrolls in their hands lit up with a bright radiance.

Activating Return Scroll... 5%... 15% ... 25%...

As the seconds passed, a killing intent suddenly locked onto Nie Yan and Tyrannical.

Nie Yan detected the presence of people in the area dashing towards them. He forcefully halted the Return Scroll. Just at this moment, a cold light flashed, and several daggers stabbed toward him and Tyrannical.

Nie Yan raised his dagger to parry, blocking the incoming attack.

「Klang!」

Eye of Truth!

The veins around Nie Yan’s eyes bulged out while his eyes turned bloodshot and blossomed with a mysterious light, locking onto silhouette after silhouette, one, two, three... There were seven Thieves in total!